Four Quarters

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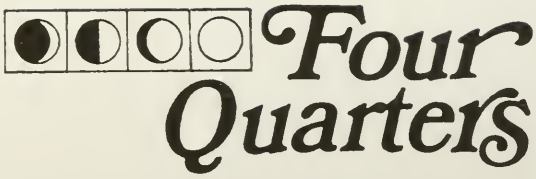

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Louis Appian (1862–1896), "A Mountain Pass."
Charcoal, sepia wash with touches of white gouache.
Our thanks to Curator Caroline Wistar of the
La Salle University Art Museum—for her assistance and for permission to reprint this drawing.

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Quarter Notes

EUGENE FITZGERALD

Selective Indignation: Art and the Government

Free lance artists, public and university museum directors, many news columnists, and a number of liberal members of Congress have expressed outrage that the federal government will not subsidize certain works of art that Senator Jesse Helms considers offensive to the sensibilities of American taxpayers. It all started when Helms wanted a rider to an appropriations amendment for the National Endowment for the Arts. The rider excludes grants for art that the North Carolina Senator and some others regard as obscene. Cut off from public money would be art which "denigrates, debases or reviles a person, or group or class of citizens on the basis of race, creed, sex, handicap, age or national origin."

Specifically, the controversy was sparked when Senator Helms objected to the homoerotic art by the late photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, who died recently of AIDS, and the photography of Andres Serrano that depicted an image of a crucifix in a jar of urine. Helms and Senator Robert C. Byrd (D., W. Va.) believed American taxpayers would be offended by such art, which included among the exhibits by Mapplethorpe photographs of a man urinating into another man's mouth and that of a bullwhip protruding from an anus.

Jesse Helms' credentials as an art critic are not the issue, nor is his reputation as an arch conservative. Most people know that the Senator from North Carolina was dragged reluctantly into endorsing many civil rights programs for Blacks and other minorities. Academics and members of both political parties have been genuinely upset by his frequent criticisms concerning the propriety and worth of courses and programs offered at the University of North Carolina. The Senator will not win any awards as the champion of academic freedom.

Funding certain types of questionable art, however, rests not on the ideological posture of Senator Helms. Essentially, the issue revolves around two questions: What should or should not be subsidized by taxpayer's money? Secondly, should we inquire into the integrity—and consistency—of those critics (artists, columnists, etc.) who maintain there should be absolute freedom of expression, no matter what the theme or depiction of the artist may be?

Each of us believe and live by certain values and priorities. Those values define us. We protest long and loud when we discover that our convictions about such matters as race, color, religion, sexual preferences, or handicaps are being ridiculed or compromised or stereotyped.

Consider some of the following hypothetical examples where groups would be outraged should the government subsidize "art" depicting individuals,

scenes and symbols in a denigrating manner:

• A painting entitled "Guido and His Blood" featuring an Italian male eating a bright tomato pizza while firing a gun at the head of an old man.

• Three Black men and two Black women laughing and winking at young children using crack. The photograph is called: "The Fun Of Being an African-American."

• A photograph of the Torah and the Star of David lying ripped and ragged in a gutter and about to be shoved into a trash trunk. Title: "Louis Farrakhan's Love For All Refuse."

• A photograph of a naked male blowing up a condom like a balloon while displaying a hypodermic needle in his left arm. Title: The Freedom To Be Gay."

• A painting of a prostitute carrying a NOW sign and spitting on the belly of a very pregnant woman. Title: "Feminist Making Two Choices."

Who determines whether these hypothetical pieces are not art? All of them have been extolled by artists, critics, and museum directors for their great originality and impressive technical excellence. "Art should be appreciated for art's sake," it is claimed by those seeking federal funding. A chorus of consensus characterizes the paintings and photographs to be ones with "aesthetically redeeming significance." One group in New York feel the works represent a "welcome return to American naturalism."

Should the government fund such "works of art?" Could we expect an outcry of indignation from Italian-Americans, Blacks, Jews, the homosexual community (as well as public health officials), and feminists? Perhaps there would be individuals deriving pleasure from the absurdity of the stereotypes in that hypothetical "art," but in all probability their approval had more to do with ingrained prejudice against the groups so thematically portrayed.

But what about the sincerity of such people as columnists, political figures, and even art critics who would protest the burlesque, the profanation, and the parody of those "art works," yet would argue that placing a crucifix in a jar of urine was somehow "artistically redeeming" and worth funding? It is no less demeaning and disgusting to both heterosexuals and homosexuals who are repelled by a photograph of a man urinating into another's mouth than the depiction of feminists as prostitutes.

Censorship is abhorrent and rightfully has been the traditional enemy of art. Yet artists who choose to express their originality—outrageously or not—as free lancers and without public subsidy do so with all the anticipated possibilities of winning approval or suffering rejection. They are free to be creative and unfettered. If they die on the vine, it is not simply because they are censored. When they flourish and are recognized, much depends on the tastes, whims and idiosyncrasies of private patrons, commercial galleries, and endowed museums.

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Artistic freedom and censorship are really red herrings in the scenario about denying public funds to art considered objectionable. Instead, attention should be focused on the integrity of those who preach freedom of artistic expression when another group's ox is being gored, but who feel (to mix a metaphor) that their own sacred cow should never be demeaned, profaned, or vulgarized, no matter how original or technically excellent a piece of art may be.

Selective indignation has a parallel in politics. Both Democrats and Republicans commonly play the "emperor has no clothes" game, whether it be the party faithful exonerating Senator Ted Kennedy for any responsibility in the death of Mary Jo Kopechne, or loyalists in the GOP staunchly believing that neither Ronald Reagan or George Bush had any knowledge of the Iran-Contra affair. In seeking NEA funds, many artists and critics feel that their pet projects always wear the illusionary clothes of justification, even works that are blatantly pornographic and denigrating.

There should be substantial federal subsidies for the arts. Compared to other nations, particularly France and West Germany, the amount of NEA grants to native artists is abysmally small. France, for example, spent $560 million on the arts, three times larger than the present NEA budget. Increasing the NEA amount will substantially allow for more creative individuals to gain recognition through national exhibits, and, in doing so, contribute to the enrichment of our cultural heritage.

Undeniably, however, politics and the taxpayer enter the picture in determining who should or should not receive National Endowment for the Arts grants. Federal appropriations come from money out of the taxpayer's pocket. Their representatives in Congress accordingly cannot ignore the sensibilities of those who elected them.

While most voters lack sophisticated artistic discernment, it is nevertheless a fact of life that their tastes, moral values and beliefs have to be taken into account. They expect their representatives to be conscious of their attitudes and feelings. Ignore them and the people correctly protest that their representatives have betrayed them.

Too often critics of the financial decisions made by Congress as to what art should be funded seem to believe that the reality of democracy can only be tested by a tolerance of the tasteless, the shocking, and the debasement of personal standards. Yet because of our pluralism, the total sense of democracy has to be broad enough to acknowledge the demands of the social, religious, ethnic, and gendered sectors which made it up. It is arbitrary and quite capricious to dismiss that spectrum of feeling as ignorant, provincial, and unworthy of any serious consideration.

When one undertakes to execute any kind of art that is new and creative, it always entails risk. Its success can never be guaranteed in advance, considering the variety of tastes and sentiments in a pluralistic society like ours. True, democracy in all of its modes can be clumsy, dismaying, and imperfect. But it is the only kind of government we have—and more importantly—the only kind of government we desire.

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BILL WINE

RUDE AWAKENING

Is this actually happening or am I dreaming? I am at the movies, settling into my seat, eager with anticipation at the prospect of seeing a long-awaited film of obvious quality. The theater is absolutely full for the late show on this weekend evening, as the reviews of this apparent cinema masterpiece have been ecstatic.

Directly in front of me sits a man just an inch or two taller than Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. His date, sitting on his left, sports the very latest in fashionable hairdos, a gathering of her golden locks into a shape that resembles the Golden Gate Bridge during rush hour.

On his right, a woman spritzes herself liberally from a perfume bottle that her popcorn-munching husband got her for Valentine's Day, something called Essence of Elk.

The row in which I sit quickly fills up with members of Cub Scout Troop 432, on an outing to the movies thanks to the sudden, rainy cancellation of their overnight hike. Their paunchy leader explains to them the rules in tonight's Best Sound Made From An Empty Good-'n'-Plenty's Box competition, about to begin.

Directly behind me, a man and his wife are ushering three other couples into their seats. I hear the woman say to the couple next to her: "You'll love it. You'll just love it. This is our fourth time and we enjoy it more and more each time. Don't we, Harry? Tell them about the pie fight scene, Harry. Wait'll you see it. It comes just before you find out that the bulimic daughter stabbed her boyfriend. "It's great."

The woman has more to say—much more—but she is drowned out at the moment by the wailing of a two-month-old infant in the row behind her. The baby is crying because his mother, who has brought her triplets to the theater to save on exorbitant babysitting costs, can only breast-feed two at a time.

Suddenly, the lights dim. The music starts. The credits roll. And I panic.

I scream and plead with everyone around me to do whatever they can to allow me to enjoy the movie. All I ask, I wail, is to be able to see the image and hear the dialogue and not find out in advance what is about to happen. Is that so much to expect for four-and-a-half bucks, I ask, now choked by a cloud of self-pity. I begin weeping unashamedly.

Then, as if on cue, the Paul Bunyon-esque chap slumps down in his seat, his wife removes her wig, the Elk lady changes her seat, the Scouts drop their candy boxes on the floor, the play-by-play commentator takes out her teeth, and the young mother takes Manny, Moe, and Jack home.

Of course I am dreaming. I realize this as soon as I gain a confirmed but confused consciousness. And I notice that I am now in a cold sweat. Not because the dream was unnerving. Just from the unadulterated shock resulting from

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a glimpse of people being that cooperative.

I realize that I have awakened to protect my central nervous system from having to handle a jolt like that. For never—*never*—would that happen in real life. Not on this planet.

I used to wonder whether I was the only moviegoer who changed his seat six times before the opening credits were over just to find an isolated spot away from the maddening crowd. I used to wonder whether I was the only dyspeptic who feared bad audience behavior more than bad moviemaking. I used to wonder whether I was the only viewer who longed for films to be more talkative than the people watching them.

But I know now that I am not. Not by a long shot.

The most frequent complaint I hear from moviegoing friends, buffs and nonbuffs alike, about the moviegoing experience has nothing whatsoever to do with the particular films that they see.

No. What folks complain about is what goes on in the audience. And that is what can only be described as an epidemic of galling inconsiderateness and outrageous rudeness.

I know, I know. I feel like a self-righteous prig even thinking this, let alone expressing it. Yet the feeling persists that we're talking about a phenomenon that threatens to drain the joy from one of life's most rewarding heightened-reality pleasures.

It is really not that difficult to forgive a person's excessive height, or malodorous perfume, or perhaps even an inadvisable but understandable need to bring very young children to adult movies.

But the talking: that is not at all easy to forgive. For it is inexcusable, really. Talking—loud, constant, and invariable superfluous—seems to be standard operating procedure on the part of most movie patrons these days. And it is as bothersome and obnoxious as would be the screaming of the word "Fire!" in the proverbial crowded theater.

It is a decidedly uphill battle to enjoy a movie—no matter how suspenseful or hilarious or moving it is—with a nonstop gabber sitting within earshot. And they come in sizes, ages, sexes, colors, and motivations of every kind.

Some chat as if there is no movie playing. Some greet friends as if at a picnic. Some alert those around them to what is going to happen, either because they have seen the film before and know, or because they are self-proclaimed experts on the predictability of plotting and want to be seen as prescient geniuses.

Some describe in graphic terms exactly what is happening as if they were doing the radio commentary for a sporting event on radio. ("Ooh, look, he's sitting down. Now he's looking at that green car. A banana—she's eating a banana.") Some audition for Gene Shalit's job by waxing witty as they critique the movie right before your very ears.

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And all act as if it is their Constitutional or God-given right. As if their admission price allows them to ruin the experience for anyone and everyone else in the building. But why?

Good question. I wish I knew. Maybe rock concerts and ball games—both environments which condone or even encourage hootin' and hollerin'—have conditioned us to voice our approval and disapproval and just about anything else we can spit out of our mouths at the slightest provocation when we are part of an audience.

But my guess lies elsewhere. The villain, I'm afraid, is the tube. We have seen the enemy and it is television. For we have gotten conditioned over the last few decades to spending most of our screen-viewing time in front of a little box in our living rooms and bedrooms.

And now, in a video age—when the small-screening of a movie is only as far away as your corner Mom-and-Pop video emporium—the vast majority of movie-watching is done not in the theater but in the home. We may tune in network broadcasting less, but the television set itself we watch more than ever.

And when we watch that piece of furniture, regardless of what is on it—be it movie, be it commercial, be it Super Bowl, be it soap opera, be it funeral procession, be it prime-time sitcom, be it Shakespeare play—we chat. Boy, do we chat. Because TV viewing tends to be an informal, gregarious, friendly, casually interruptible experience, we talk whenever the spirit moves us. Which is often.

And we have learned to live with that, and to see as eccentric anyone who demands total silence and attention from other family members during the viewing of any television offering whatever. I mean, you can watch if you want to, we tell them, but I'm sure as hell gonna talk if I want to.

All of which is fine. But we have carried this behavior, which is perfectly acceptable in the family living room, right to our neighborhood movie theater, where we are doing unto our neighbors what we wouldn't mind that they do unto us—*at home.*

And it is turning lots of people off to what used to be a truly pleasurable experience: sitting in a jammed movie theater and watching a crowd-pleasing movie. And that is a first-class shame.

Nobody wants Fascist-like ushers, yet that may be where we're headed of necessity. Let's hope not. But something's got to give.

For movies during this Age of Video may or may not be better than ever. About audiences, however, there is no question.

They are worse.

JOHN LUKACS

A Valley's Voyage Through Time

The valley of Gastein—Gasteinertal—is a long crevasse between two stretches of high mountains in Austria, coming to an end at a still higher wall of mountains, snow-capped all year round, blocking it from the south. This is one of the two Austrian Alpine regions which are not yet crossed by stunning automobile highways poised on ferroconcrete gooselegs one thousand feet in the air; but an indeed spectacular rail line does bore through it, a triumph of engineering achieved during the last years of the Austrian Empire, the time which intellectual fashion demands that it be defined as "inevitable" dissolution and decay.

But then the history of the Gasteinertal has had its share of exceptions. Thousands of years after the Celtic peoples had settled in the far western islands and headlands of Europe some of them came to the Alpine valleys of the continent and left their marks of habitation during what is called the Austrian Late Bronze Age. As in other parts of Germany, the Christian missionaries came from the far west, not from the south: not from Italy and the Mediterranean but from the rainswept islands of Ireland and England. Eight centuries later Lutheranism took root among the gnarled, headstrong peasantry of the Gasteinertal, together with a tribal kind of prosperity: gold and silver were hacked out of the mountains through the enterprise of a few determined families. They had risen from the peasantry; in less than two centuries they would decline to the peasantry again.

At that time the Gastein valley was the southernmost portion of the Archepiscopal state of Salzburg. We are accustomed to regard the Germanies before Bismarck as divided, and the Habsburg monarchy of Austria as united; indeed, the Germanies consisted of as many as seventeen hundred states during the 17th and 18th centuries (of which even thirty-nine remained after the Congress of Vienna), while Austria was governed centrally from the great capital of Vienna. Yet the Salzburg Archbishopric was a separate state until as late as 1816. Its destinies differed from those of the surrounding lands. During the Thirty Years' War a diplomatic Archbishop of Salzburg, Paris Lodron, a kind of Alpine Richelieu, succeeded in keeping the horrific armies of that war away from his domains. But one hundred years later, when the fires of religious wars had burned out elsewhere in Europe, another Archbishop, Firmian, chose to force the Protestants of the Archbishopric, including those of the Gasteinertal, to emigrate. By that time the gold and silver mines were closed down. A great silence fell upon the valley. The shadows of mountains made it remote again.

Another one hundred years later the name "Gastein" became familiar all over the Habsburg lands and the Germanies.The thermal waters of Gastein

were known for a long time but few people availed themselves thereof. The waters were known for their healing properties to the extent that around 1800 there was a thermal pool for horses, not people. During the 19th century spas and watering-places became famous. A commonsense explanation of this is the swollen girth of the Bourgeois Age, including the swollen stomachs and livers of its beneficiaries. But there was more than that. The central belt of the European continent teems with thermal resources— potential spas—yet not all of them grew to fame during the nineteenth century. Gastein had an additional attraction: its mountains. This attraction was the result of Romanticism. As the great English thinker Owen Barfield once wrote in a memorable sentence: "A hundred and fifty years ago when mountains were still 'horrid,' the foundations of the present economic structure of Switzerland were being quietly laid by the dreams of a few lake poets and their brother romantics." Mountains had become beautiful. Consequently physicians discovered the healing essences of the mountain air, and of the mountain waters. The mountain spas came into existence. The Emperor Franz I visited Hofgastein. The water of Badgastein, four miles away and one thousand feet higher, was channeled down in wooden pipes. Except for the water, thereafter everything went uphill, from Hofgastein to Badgastein.

One generation after Kaiser Franz's visit, Gastein was in the league with the most famous European watering-places: Baden-Baden, Bad Ems, Homburg, Vichy, Evian, Aix-les-Baius, far surpassing the reputation of the original Spa (in Belgium). General Von Moltke visited the Badgastein in 1859 and told his ruler about it. William I of Prussia (later the Emperor of Germany) came to Gastein twenty times during the next twenty five years. In 1863 Franz Joseph and William met in Gastein for the first time. Its reputation now earned it a place in the diplomatic history of Europe.

Bismarck (who suffered from gastric trouble throughout most of his life) maneuvered his Austrian counterpart in 1865 to the short war between Prussia and Austria and to the defeat of the latter in the following year. Thirteen years later it was in the Hotel Straubinger (it still exists) where Bismarck and the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Minister Andrássy signed the Dual Alliance between the two empires. The Kings of Greece, of Rumania, of Saxony were Gastein visitors; so was the the Emperor of Brazil in 1876 (he must have been a forerunner of the jet-setters; he had visited the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition in the same year). In July 1886 the last great meeting of the imperial families took place at Gastein. The *Kaiserbegeguung* Franz Joseph, the Empress Elizabeth, the ninety-year-old William I and his grandson, (soon to become William II) met there. During the next four years the melancholy Empress Elizabeth came to Badgastein every summer. She walked far into the mountains.

By the turn of the century Gastein had become more bourgeois than aristocratic. The Central European bourgeoisie, Lutheran, Catholic and Jewish, as well as occasional English visitors, were layered among the dozens of Kurhotels, cheaper hotels (especially for the frugal North German clientele), guest-houses and *pensions*: The North Germans particularly preferred Gastein with its mountain atmosphere, the pert waitresses with their easy manners, the green velvet aprons of the mountains and of the women, the Austrian *Gemütlichkeit* of domesticity, prettiness, and comfort. As the pretext of coming

for the waters receded, the pace of the social life increased. Then, in 1909, the railway was completed and the Gastein boom went on.

There is a 1909 atmosphere in Gastein even now. The hotels of the turn of the century are still there, imbedded in the mountainside. The great Gastein waterfall thunders day and night; at night the hidden arc-lamps bathe its precipice at the bottom, and the spray of the crashing foam rises in a wondrous swirling cloud, as romantic and mysterious as anything in the paintings of Johann Caspar Friedrich. Principal walks still bear the names of the Kaiserin Elizabeth and of Kaiser Wilhelm. In the evening the promenades are deserted but the windows of the elegant shops with their expensive silks and scarves and the fine leathers glisten, a jeweled setting surrounded by the darker glassy shapes of more modern hotels, situated further down. If—all of the industrious nostalgia of the Austrians notwithstanding—the scene is reminiscent of Franz Joseph and of Elizabeth only on occasion, it is at least reminiscent of Stefan Zweig. (The bookstore carries all of his books in paperback).

That was the first period of opulent prosperity in the Gasteinertal. Then came the catastrophe of 1914. In the vestibule of the parish church of Hofgastein there is a marble memorial tablet, and next to it, under glass the faded photographs of the men of that community who died in the First World War, faded grey and yellow photographs of sad, serious, wide-eyed peasant faces under their Austrian chakos. "Gefallen" or "Verschwunden": fallen or disappeared. But another decade later, Gastein revived. It had survived the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire, as indeed had Austrian culture during its last high period. Tourism, that great industry of the twentieth century, reappeared again. Between 1926 and 1936 the prosperity of Gastein returned, together with many of the pre-war guests. There was a difference now. There were, for the first time, many Englishmen and Englishwomen, even Americans. At dinnertime the pianists and the trios played Lehár, Kálmán, Strauss, Millöcker, as of yore; but they also played the music of the Berlin jazzy operettas and tunes by Gershwin and Kern. The Austrian government allowed the opening of a casino.

There were now two seasons in Gastein, not only the summer one from May to September, but also a winter one. For every guest who came to take the waters there were now ten or more skiers. Yet the scene and its comforts remained the main attraction: the hotels furnished with brown plush *Stilmöbel* as well as the handcrafted wrought iron gates and lamps and dirndl costumes, that discovery of the charms of Austrian peasant baroque which became fashionable in places as far east as the villas of Budapest and as far west as Curzon Street in London. It was a meeting place for two generations: that of my grandparents, both born in 1872 who came to Gastein several times with their serious bourgeois clothes and modest hats; that of my mother, born in 1902, hatless, with her shimmering short dresses and long pearl necklaces, who was in Gastein after and before her marriage, when she was still chaperoned by my grandmother, and who was asked to tea-dance several times by an English duke (or was he a viscount? or an earl?) a story which I heard more than once, which no doubt contributed to my beautiful mother's Anglomania, a consequence of which was her insistence that her son be taught

English from the age of five and sent to English schools, one of the things for which he remains forever grateful.

But underneath this hotel civilization— and literally thus, for they lived in the basements of the great hotels— was the world of the waiters and waitresses and porters and mechanics, the sons and daughters of the Gastein valley peasantry riven by the natural identity crisis of the Austrian people. Some of them were to be impressed with the fantastic success of their countryman Hitler across the Alps, whose fatherland was Austria but who identified himself with his great tragic mother Germania who took him for her husband. And on a cold March Saturday in 1938 Hitler made the union of Austria with Germany. Soon came the Second World War, in which another one hundred of Gasteiners lost their lives. There is no memorial commemorating them; and the histories of Gastein skim over those tragic years in a few sentences.

In the last week of the war, in the brilliant late spring of May 1945, the American Army arrived and occupied the hotels and the *pensions* of Badgastein and Hofgastein for a year or so. And thereby hangs the thread of this short article, which is the Americanization— and the non-Americanization — of the Europe of Gastein, something that is intertwined with the existence and with the memories of this writer, whose mother is Europe and whose wife is America, whereto he came in the year when the Americans were in Gastein.

The Americanization of the world, of which the Americanization of Gastein is of course just a part, is probably the main story of the twentieth century but it is a story of such enormous proportions, so worldwide and so protean in its manifestations and evidence, that no historian will ever tackle it. It is a development which is cultural and social even more than political and military. Its main element is the emulation of the social order (and, at times, of disorder) that made the United States famous and rich. Its economic and social substance may be summed up in a single phrase: giving credit to the masses. This, even more than the outpouring of American dollars, or the Marshall Plan, led to the democratic prosperity of Western Europe soon after the war. As in the United States, consumer credit became an everyday matter. *On ne prête qu'aux riches*—only the rich are able to borrow— was typical of European capitalism before the Second World War; this rings hollow now, a *bon mot* from a sunken time.

The third, and largest, wave of prosperity for places such as the Gastein Valley began around 1950 and has continued without abating until this day. (One example: the peak in the number of visitors occurred in 1974, the very year when the oil crisis hit Europe). Every two or three years another soaring ski-lift is completed, wafting people to hitherto unreachable Alpine peaks. There are ever more hotels. The building regulations are very strict; there are but a few buildings, here and there (and usually down in the valleys), whose artless surrealist appearance disfigures the scene.

There are all kinds of results of this Americanization, good and bad, in Gastein. There is a Convention Center in Badgastein wedged in between the hotels, a great concrete turtle, as ugly as anything conceived by a graduate of the Yale School of Architecture; its bookstore contains the German editions of *Playboy* and *Penthouse* which are now, I think, the only American magazines

published worldwide. Even in the Grand Hotel of Hofgastein, where the manager's beautiful wife appears at the weekly reception for the guests in a velvet-panelled long-skirted dirndl, the salad table features Thousand Island Dressing. The mimeographed program listing the daily events and the menus of the hotel ends with a Joke of The Day, as if the Grand Hotel were a Holiday Inn in California. But all of this does not matter against the long run: without the American contribution to the defeat of Hitler, without the American presence in Europe thereafter this kind of sunny, late-afternoon prosperity could not have happened. Material prosperity is often destructive as well as constructive: but here its destructiveness has not carried the day, the Americanization of the Gasteinertal left plenty of opportunity for restoration as well as for leveling and this includes the Promenade Kaiserin Elisabeth and the continued presence of the human music of the past.

And now it seems, at least to this writer, that this Americanization is slowly, gradually, coming to its end. This change is beginning to appear on different levels of life.

There are two cultures in the life of the world now, not at all the Two Cultures about which the fatuous Lord Snow trumpeted forth his theory, which was the existence of two separate parallel cultures, the humanistic and the scientific-technological, whose representatives knew little or nothing about each other's "field." No: the two cultures are neither separate nor parallel. They overlap, and they exist on different levels. One is the international; the other is national. One is represented by the international language of the network of business, of technology, of conference centers, of sociological jargon, of computers, of telex, of airline and airport lingo; the other by the language of domestic life. The first language is Americanized and in many instances outright American: the phenomenon known as *franglais* in France has its equivalents everywhere in Europe, including Gastein. The second, in vocabulary as well as in tone, is as Austrian as ever; and there is no reason to believe that it will gradually disappear. Outward appearances, too, reflect this: blue jeans and fringed cowboy jackets come and go, while the local dress of women and men stays as prevalent as it was fifty years ago.

The American physical presence, too, is less than it was twenty or thirty years ago. For every American visitor or tourist in the Gastein valley there are one hundred, perhaps two hundred Germans. And when we drive on the Autobahn in Germany the occasional signs indicating an American military enclave or command post already give the faint impression of anachronism, a leftover impression from the era of the German-American symbiosis, when the principal political reality in West Germany was the American military presence stretching ahead to the Iron Curtain.

For nearly one hundred years, from the middle of the last century to the middle of this one, Austrians had an identity crisis: if they could not keep their position as the ruling nation of the Habsburg Empire they might as well join their German-speaking brethren across the Alps. It was because of this identity crisis that the inspiration of the Nazi movement was often South German and that the presence of the former Austrians in the SS was more than considerable. But now another identity, another role has come into being:

Austria as another Switzerland, a neutral Alpine republic, a bridge connecting not Berlin and Rome but West and East, prosperous between the two power blocs, America and Russia.

Democratic and partially Americanized as she is, with a Communist party that is one of the least significant of Europe, Austria is moving slowly, imperceptibly toward the East. Vienna has already regained her former position as the great cosmopolitan Danubian central capital city, a meeting place of Western and Eastern Europe, in many ways and on many levels. To demonstrate this could be the subject of a long article, perhaps even a book: suffice it to say that the historical rhythm of Central Europe has begun to draw Austrians (and Germans) closer to the European East than to the American West; but Communism has nothing to do with this.

This is a relatively new development, the consequences of which are unpredictable but I do not think that we ought to be unduly worried about it. The European East has been moving westward, too, for more than twenty years now. The Austrians know that the Soviet Empire (and the Russian danger) is not what it used to be; but, then *mutatis mutandis*, that is true of the American empire too.

The darkest writer and the darkest seer of this century, the Frenchman Louis-Ferdinand Celine, thought that the defeat of the German Army at Stalingrad meant the death-knell of European civilization; later, toward the end of his life he thought that the Americanism and the democratization of Europe meant nothing; sooner or later the Chinese will be at the English Channel, *les Chinois à Brest*. Well, the Chinese now imitate America even more thoughtlessly than the Europeans ever had; they are not in Brest, and the Russians are not in Gastein. However, the latter may arrive one day: a new Russian tourist class, emerging from the transformations of Russian society. I cannot see the Chinese in Brittany, or even the green tunics of Russian soldiers in the Gastein valley; but I can imagine the Russian and Prussian tourists, in their heavy tweeds, eventually promenading on the Elisabeth and the Kaiser-Wilhelm alleys, sometime in the twenty-first century.

". . . the historical rhythm of Central Europe has begun to draw Austrians (and Germans) closer to the European East than to the American West."

The fields are spangled with dandelions, the meadows with wildflowers, the Mercedes swish on the highways, the golden and wheat-colored baroque sconces and swirls are freshly painted around the windowframes, the bright red geraniums glow in the dark green windowboxes, the pastry-shops are chock-full with young people and choc-full tortes, the loden-coated visitors walk in the thin rain with their sensible shoes. In America the age of democracy is in its third century. Here the age of democracy has only recently begun. It was in the Gasteinertal, not in the United States, that one hundred years ago history began to accelerate. The imperial phase was followed by the bourgeois phase, after which came the short and painful Third Reich chapter, after which came the American phase and that, too, will pass. In any event, the mountains, the skiing, and its Americanization notwithstanding, the Gastein valley is not at all like Colorado, and while Austrian-style chalets and German investors

may crowd into Aspen and Vail, the lives of Hofgastein and Badgastein are less and less like those of Aspen and Vail every year.

All of this has something to do with the spiritualization of matter— a difficult phrase by which I mean simply that in the history of mankind the relationship of mind and matter is not constant, because the intrusion of mind into matter increases, something which, Darwin and Marx and even Freud notwithstanding, is the only meaningful evolution there is. For two thousand years the material existence of people in the Gastein valley depended on agriculture. They lived from the soil and the trees. Then came a century or so of hollow poverty. Then, five hundred years ago, they dug into the mountains for gold and silver. They could not eat silver: they lived from what they were paid for their industry. When the mines ceased to be worked there came another trough of poverty. Then came the prosperity due to the thermal water. That water was material; but what attracted the paying crowds was not altogether material. The people of the Gastein valley now lived from what they were paid for their services to visitors.

". . . mountains will never become "horrid" again."

There are still the people who come to Gastein to soothe their bodies; but their numbers do not compare to the numbers of those who come for that kind of well-being which modern humanity wants, of which the beautiful landscape is as much an ingredient as is the comfort of hotels, and the peaceful rhythm of the day as is the mountain air: they seek the agreeable healing of their minds as much, if not more, than the agreeable pleasures of their bodies. Thus the people of the Gasteinertal now prosper from the very perception of the atmosphere of their valley. From agriculture through industry to service and maintenance— from the chancellors of the Archbishops through the Vienna financiers and the bourgeois and then to Americanization— and what is next to come? I do not know.

But I know one thing: mountains will never become "horrid" again. That is inconceivable: because it is unimaginable. Romanticism was not merely the reaction to rationalism, a swing of the pendulum. We are — for better or worse — all Romantics now.

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NANCY FOX

Treadle

Secretly, I think, she loves the ends
of things raveling less than the living do.
Her hand, twice, closes a hem
and steams the woven fall into line
as my pencil poises. Her head bends;
her faceless black iron horse

runs by a foreleg, needle-hoofed
and goaded by her right sole;
her right palm teases a wheel-tail
to clatter around and cross back,
obedient to the dressmaster's will.
She works a bolt, a slow unwinding

roll of pale pin flowers
on years of dark matte, or washed
flatly in white. Her road is straight,
basted, gathered, repeated closely.
Her left hand guides the right's way.
Out of the odd sheet, the pane

Of chill muslin, a pattern pleats.
I see her now in every fall
of trained fold, trimly tied,
in every step I try to order
and cut a swath before I see
the length of it. After she died,

I found her later cloths in strange
measures, seamed unequally,
as if on a final bend her eye
had filled with whatever fine dust
her found journey raises. In
the end she is made renitent

by things she made neatly, and neatly
folded away from the needle-point
of my pencil's tracing in soft lead.

In a still life, miles are concealed.
They cross-stitch one another tightly
enough to disguise the threads that loosen.

VINCENT KLING

A Conversation With Bobbie Ann Mason

She isn't recondite, she isn't grotesque, she isn't minimalist, she isn't experimental, she isn't ideological. She stands quietly shoulder-to-shoulder with her characters, unruffled and unjudging no matter what they say or do, and yet passionately committed to their every move and every gesture. She guards their right to be themselves. Like so many writers, Bobbie Ann Mason says that she waits patiently for her characters to disclose themselves through attitude and action, through the clothes they wear or the music they listen to. One of her greatest strengths is what she does with those characters after they've made themselves known to her. She has the uncanny wit to take them as she finds them, to accept them as they are without dressing them up or down.

It calls for one kind of skill to keep the pale fires burning or to launch Flaubert's parrot in its dizzy flight, another kind, just as exacting, to make us forget that an artist is at work. Convoluted surfaces and self-referential devices are not for Bobbie Ann Mason. She's written astutely about Nabokov, but she doesn't situate her craft anywhere notably close to his. Perhaps she wouldn't mind (what writer would?) a comparison with Katherine Anne Porter. My experience has been that green undergraduates and burnished critics alike come away with the certainty that *something* has happened in "Nancy Culpepper" or "The Rookers," just as in Porter's "The Grave" or "The Circus." Mere vignettes—such small detail, such commonplace episodes. Yet we finish fairly bemused by the depth at which we know Miranda. Everything appears to have arranged itself, to have fallen into place through some routine domestic economy that anyone could manage.

This kind of seeming artlessness requires concentration and skill beyond most writers' capacity. Everything is there as an unassuming object in a simple scene, but everything is an enormously charged symbol of every event and every feeling. The bullet-pocked log cabins in "Shiloh" become in themselves the marriage that has grown to be a civil war. A woman's ordinary vegetable garden in *Spence + Lila* gently gets transformed through timing and arrangement into a temporary but triumphant paradise regained. A young girl seeing television for the first time in "Detroit Skyline 1949" has to adjust her vision before she can make out the dim figures on the screen; that need for adjustment becomes her whole emotional venture into joy and pain as she tries to take in what she only half-understands. And all that rendered detail ends in felt experience, in the completeness that comes of coherent, valid emotion. This is a writer who cares about her characters and has the craft to make us do the same.

Talking with Bobbie Ann Mason when she was here at La Salle University in October of 1988 was as much a pleasure as I'd anticipated, but in a very different way. I thought I'd get her to talk about the continuity of Southern literature, about being a woman writer, and about pastoral. She gently warded off those professorial-style questions and took the conversation where *she* wanted it to go. The more she did, the better it went. I felt like Pascal, who said he went to Montaigne expecting to find a style but that he came away having found a person.

As an academic, I suppose I'm accustomed to applying labels and categories. So if I ask about scholarly treatments of pastoral it's to say that I came to the end of Spence + Lila and thought, "We're in a garden, and life has triumphed, and growing things are being harvested and the couple is back together in every sense." So I wondered if Bobbie Ann Mason (being a Ph.D. in literature) had thought about Louis Simpson on pastoral, for instance. I can't imagine any writer doing such a thing, but I wondered if you'd started with an overall pattern.

You say you couldn't imagine any writer stopping to think about Louis Simpson at that moment. Of course I wouldn't; it would get in the way. I think I knew intuitively the progress of the story from sickness to health, and it's emotionally the way things *had* to progress.

But a writer thinks about things really in quite literal, specific terms. Is Lila going to have chemotherapy in the story? Does she feel well enough to come home from the hospital? Does she feel well enough to go out to her garden? What is growing in the garden? I mean you're stuck on that level, that's the level you operate on. Really you're working out all the surface details, and if they're right then the other will come through. But you can't start with the thematic content and work backwards.

You said earlier today that the story you read ("Midnight Magic") began when you saw a man sitting in a car that had "Midnight Magic" painted on the back and he looked terrible, so you asked yourself what could have brought him to that point.

Yes, that's the kind of scene that triggers my imagination. With the "pastoral" scene at the end of *Spence + Lila*—you know that's a personal story and I don't mind saying it was drawn very closely from my parents. But also they became fictional characters at some point so that I was able to deal with them without too much baggage, personal baggage. Still, I *know* what it's like to see my mother in the garden and so my mother was in the garden, with the beans and the cucumbers getting ripe. That's the time to get her laughter; it was the sound of her laughter that was the important thing to me. The sound of her laughter, her attitude, her feelings for the garden and her connection with her husband—just all those emotional things. You could call it pastoral if you want to, but it was not the way I went about it.

I'm not surprised. Most people who exercise a demanding craft don't seem to be helped by thinking about it in a distanced, theoretical way.

It's a perspective I couldn't possibly have as I write. Maybe intellectually I could have it later, or maybe I could be shown things about my work by critics and reviewers that would surprise me and please me and ring a bell and I'd say, "Oh yeah, *that's* what I was trying to do."

It's a different language, and not just a different language, but maybe a different thought process and different side of the brain in operation in the creative process as opposed to the critical process. Not that a writer isn't capable of both or that a critic isn't capable of both either; we all have different ways of operating.

I guess I have a kind of perverse reaction to a lot of labels. I tend to want to resist some things. If you say I'm a Southern writer I want to say, "Oh, not really," or if you say I'm not a Southern writer I might say, "Of course I am!" There's that kind of perverse habit of mine I have, and then there's a kind of resistance I have out of my own personal experience to academic approaches.

When I was teaching and would go into the classroom and I would be teaching Southern literature, I would feel compelled to instruct the kids on the pastoral and the Agrarian movement and all that belongs under that topic. I would feel that I had to impose all of that on them because as a teacher one has to be the authority and since then, since I no longer teach, I never want to be in that position again. I never want to be in a position of being a false authority, and as teacher I never really felt secure in the knowledge I was trying to impart to them or in my supposed authority. So it feels very liberating to me not to have to come on that way, just to talk in a more straightforward way about what I do and what is important to me in what I write. But I'm resisting your questions!

That's perfectly all right. I can always come up with categories and labels. The excitement now is to hear what you say irrespective of what I'm asking, just as I like it when a student says, "I don't agree," or, "I don't like the way you're running this class." I'm not a very secure person, but I'm glad when that happens.

I've been thinking a lot lately about academic approaches as opposed to the creative process. I've visited classes and the students very often want to know what something means or what the theme is, or they're discussing the symbols. Those were certainly not the things I thought I was dealing with when I wrote the story, but they very well may be there in the finished product.

In that situation it's a little hard for me to say what is exciting about the work for me and what went into it and what I thought I was doing. Here's an example from my novel *In Country*. The character Emmett sometimes wears a skirt. He wears a wrap-around Indian-print skirt with elephants on it. Somewhere, some student has written a term paper about why he's wearing a skirt. Well, when I wrote this—it was one of the first scenes I wrote when I began writing *In Country*—I was captivated by the idea of this guy putting a skirt on and I didn't know why he was doing it, but that was one notion I kept from the very beginning throughout the whole process of writing—this guy in a skirt. It was mysterious and I had to develop it as I went along and make discoveries about it, but in the final analysis I can't reduce to any meaning why he wore that skirt. Still, it's an indelible part of the story; it's part of the fabric.

When I went to Kentucky during the filming of *In Country* the wardrobe mistress showed me the skirt that Bruce Willis was going to wear in the movie. There it was. It was made tangible. She had found it in a thrift shop or somewhere. It was from the 60's, an Indian-print wrap-around skirt with elephants on it. I had made it up in my mind, but it actually existed. To me it was a lot more exciting to see that skirt come to life than it was to know that somebody had written a paper telling what that skirt meant because seeing the skirt come to life was more in tune with the imaginative process. It was the way I saw it in my imagination and it was what it meant in my imagination <197>just the textures of it, the elephants on it and all that.

I don't mean that the person writing the term paper about what it meant is barking up the wrong tree. But seeing that actual skirt made concrete reminded me of what was special to me about it in the novel. It was the vitality of it. You always come to the question of whether the work is interesting or not. Does this follow this? Is this passage dull? Do the characters come to life and are they interesting? Do you care about them? What are they eating for breakfast? Where are they going today? How are they going to deal with this problem? That's the level you're operating on when you're writing and I think it's the level you're operating on when you're reading, but not when you're trying to analyze.

A very general question about where Nabokov might fit. I think your first book was about him. How did you move from such a self-conscious artist to your own seemingly artless way?

There's a strong connection in the business of that skirt. I was very charmed to read Nabokov once in an interview when he gave his response to the movie of *Lolita*. He loved the way the actress drew her sweater around her shoulders. He thought that was just lovely. Apparently in his mind it evoked the true Lolita. It evoked something about her vitality and what she meant to him as a character. He was a writer who resisted characterization and analysis of meaning and he thought that everything was on the surface, except that the surface was a prism of infinite mirrors and reflections. There are certain affinities I feel with Nabokov, and you know that I wrote my dissertation on him in graduate school. But I don't think his influence or connection should be blown out of proportion; there are many other influences in my life too.

Like your mother's garden. That's beautiful. That stays with me. What about other writers you grew up with?

Well, I didn't read much good writing when I was in high school. I didn't discover literature until college. In high school I read *Forever Amber* and *Peyton Place* and a lot of pseudo-science things like *The Search for Bridey Murphy*.

Oh, for heaven sakes, we're the only people left who remember that, you and I. I can't wait to put that in.

There was no one to steer me in any direction, so I just drifted. When I got to college I read Salinger, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe.

Was there anyone when you started out writing fiction you thought you wanted as a model, or did you immediately say, "I just want to put down whatever I have felt, experienced, remembered"?

No, I started writing in college. I guess Scott Fitzgerald was my favorite and I thought his writing was so beautiful, stylistically, and the romance of his generation was all so pure, soft. He was probably my strongest influence at that time.

What about favorites among your own stories? They get strong reactions from other readers. My students loved "Shiloh." I love "Detroit Skyline 1949." I remember the margarine, the old TVs; I remember the Red scare. Maybe it's about being a certain age.

A number of people have said the same thing to me about "Detroit Skyline," and I think it's because they have a personal connection to those memories. So different people have different favorites. My favorite of what I've written is *In Country*. I feel that's special.

I'm proud of the novel and awed by the characters—very fond of the characters. I feel proud of it because I felt it touched on something that reaches a lot of people and that's why I'm excited about the movie. The movie reaches a much larger audience than I could. It's not my work exactly, but it's going to reach someone. I think the subject is very important. I wouldn't say that about other things I've written, but in that case just the subject alone is very important. I guess one story I'm especially fond of is "Nancy Culpepper." I could identify with her a lot.

Thanks for such a thoughtful and honest exchange. I'm learning more through your not anwering my questions. Why don't I just ask an open question. What hasn't come up that you would really want to say? What would you want a reading public to know?

You asked about other things that shaped me, other shaping influences. Well, you know, you can look at the evidence. You can look at the fact that I wrote a book about Nabokov and that I'm from the South, and that I liked Scott Fitzgerald, but the real shaping influence? I guess it's really the Southern culture that has had the most profound influence on me personally.

I'm writing about some kinds of people that aren't restricted to the South; they're all over. But they're people I come from and am still connected to. Readers who don't know about their world are often mystified by my writing, or they may understand the writing OK but would never dream that I might have come out of that world, so they treat me as if I'm somehow remote from it, but that's not really true. I keep trying to explain something about the hold of that culture and the pervasiveness of it and how it's all around us.

Yet people who read books aren't necessarily knowledgeable about that world. You know, this goes back again to my resistance against the academic because I'm writing about people who wouldn't know a good book if it hit them on the head and, you know, I care about those people.

It may bother me that they don't read, but I don't think that their lives are any less valid or that their emotions or feelings are any less complex. I'm not

even sure where I belong myself. I still have one foot in that culture and it drags me back, and yet it nourishes me too. I'm not sure whether it's better to be sophisticated or not.

Let me think. I think I have somewhere to go with this. You know, these people—some of them may be sending money to those tele-evangelists and they may be voting for Bush and who knows what else they're going to do, but I feel like their lives are ignored and that they're put down for those things that I just mentioned, when, you know, maybe that's not everything about them. It's so easy to ignore them because they have no power.

I actually write about people on the way up, people in the middle classes, and I guess people associate the Kmart with my characters and say in a kind of condescending way that these are people who have nothing better to do than shop at the Kmart or that their values are so shoddy and materialistic that they're defined by the Kmart. Well, I really resist that, resist that very much, because as I said—and I've said this before—if they could afford to shop at Saks Fifth Avenue maybe they would, but they can't. They're caught up in the limited appeal of what Kmart has to offer and the people who are doing the criticizing probably have more money and can go to better stores. I just find that a kind of hypocrisy. I can't accept it. So, you know, its not that I'm celebrating the Kmart but I'm very aware of the limitations of these characters' world and of what's informing and defining their responses. I feel very sympathetic towards them for those reasons.

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JACK HART

Teaching Literature

I cannot read these lines for fear
My voice might break—
  though who would hear?

JANE SATHER

A Prayer in Four Seasons

to be spoken over the bones of the undead

I stand on the porch and watch an owl,
sunk in himself, against a slip of moon, shoulder
a wind whose presence is revealed in the swaying
of icicles attached to a low branch.
This could never happen during the day.

A chalk circle drawn by starlight was rained away
this morning. But now, in the garden, sunlight swings
like a hammock between the oak and almond, and brilliant
bits of rag protect the new beans.

The dry fields want burning, but the danger
is still too great. In the afternoon the surrounding hills
simmer. I bury a disc of green sea glass and wish for rain.

At sunrise I kick through mounds of sodden, half-burnt matter,
leaves and feathers; lifeless discards, the shadows of bones.

JANE SATHER

Death in Mid-winter

1. *Visiting the cemetery*

Snow tops the crosses and stones,
luminescent bars, white
against the gray concrete.

The row of mounds, covered
tarpaulins, covering earth from
graves dug in September.

2. *Burying the Dead*

They stand like a comma to the right of the plot
while the minister reads a prepared prayer—downcast
eyes, lids moving like water-filled blisters.

Flakes of burnt paper fly from the church's
chimney, settle and stick in the drift
like so many holes in the snow's mass.

3. *The deceased speaks*

Unwrapped, I demand mending—
my clipped top sloppily stitched up,
body drained and sunken, skin eggshell blue.

You'll see the results when I lie, face
refinished, cuts sown, in this
satin-lined capsule, comfortable as hell.

SONYA SENKOWSKY

Grandfather's Wake

In that one space, I couldn't be sure whether all at once I was smelling perfume or dust or what. It was more like wood —like my grandparents' cedar closet—but I knew it was probably oak, or whatever the coffin was made of. I really expected everything to smell like formaldehyde and be disinfected-sterile like the hospital had been. But here dust sat under the chairs in webby little fluffs that floated across the carpet when you passed near them.

The space was all misty, and all green, and held a wide open room that had tightly-matted grey carpeting and opened into all the other rooms of the house. On the one side, the front door and waiting area and guestbook, where everyone carefully signed in before filing past us; on the other side, the part of the house that was lived-in: a business desk, glass cabinets filled with dolls, and a bureau holding a plate of mints.

Most people came in through the front, but that started at least an hour after my parents and I had been let in through the back door. We had to walk through a small, bright kitchen that had cat potholders in it and a green and growing terrarium at its window. Pushing through faint traces of pot roast and potatoes, we were urged into that darker room with the desk and the mints and the dolls and then left to enter the bigger room on our own.

My parents went past me and confronted the box with its flowers and my grandfather; they knelt together solemnly, my mother turning to my father and whispering something softly, then putting her arm around him for a moment. They were nothing but a practiced blur in the corner of my eye. I leaned in the slim doorway and looked the other way, at the chairs.

Above the dust rose two hard Victorian couches and two stern chairs. They were so low that I didn't think at first we were supposed to sit on them. My father still knelt at his post, but my mother went toward the chairs and sat on the one, using the armrest to brace her camera arm. She was waiting for the orange light to go on to tell her the flash was ready, and my father looked back over his shoulder to give her a questioning look.

They took two with him, two with her, and then had me take one of both. I framed everyone neatly, gave it a flash and ignored their backdrop. They got one of me, too—later, when I knelt over there.

The camera got put away when the people came. Twelve rows of metal folding chairs shrunk back at the far side of the room, lined up even and polite, like all those strangers that were walking past his face. The dusty mint of the walls and the curtains took the colors out of everyone's faces and left us looking green and pale. Everything was old. One aunt wasn't dressed in black, but in a brown slightly darker than the casket. She was crying, though, and the way she leaned over the body when her turn came, I thought she was going to leave some tears on my grandfather's nose, which is what stuck out of the box the most.

From a distance, from one of the couches, you couldn't really tell how his eyes were sunken and his mouth held almost the turn of a smile. You also couldn't tell what my mom had shown me earlier, whispering over to me, "Look, see how they do this? He has cardboard in his pants. That's what they did, they put cardboard-"

But you could see the straight, sharp pleat of his right leg. She had taken one earlobe between her fingers and tried to get it to stay straight, but it had flopped back, really too long to be an earlobe. I mentioned his smile and she said, "When we went to the morgue, they hadn't closed his eyes and he was biting his lip. Your dad fixed it." I couldn't see his earlobe from the couch either. Just his straightness and the three bursts of orange and yellow flowers and the military cap they pinned to the coffin's open lid.

People apologized, as if for crossing the big, open space of the room's center, when they came over and shook our hands. Some didn't know what to do with me and just nodded until my mother or father told them I was theirs. They were mostly relatives, and were shaking their heads and kissing everyone in the line. After a while, I expected this and accidentally kissed someone whom my mom told me later was the undertaker. But then a few people I didn't know kissed me and I sat down. The room was now full of perfumes and old fur smells, the scent of mothballs and almost the formaldehyde smell I had thought about before.

The sofas had those square and spiky carpet savers underneath them, but not under where the legs ended. The dents in the floor showed where everything should have been, and the little plastic things were off by themselves. But no-one ended up sitting for long anyway, because the priest came in and we all stood.

The family's Ukrainian, and so was every word the priest said. The prayers went past me in a hazy, comfortable way as I swayed in place. When something he started sounded like the Lord's prayer and everyone mumbled to it, I did too, moving my lips and copying their inflections. Then he went into something else.

He was bald, with a big red, white and gold cape, a satin pointed hat and a little black book which he carried lightly in his right hand. Everything he said he seemed to take from that book, after easily flipping it open to the pages he needed. But he kept losing his place and forgetting his words. I could sing along in my mind to his voice for only a short time, and then he would "ahhhhh," then find his place, then "ahhhhh" again. He rushed through it all as quickly as he could manage, and I remembered my grandmother's ceremony, and how it had been the same then, too, despite the priest's greying eyebrows and the book's yellow pages that flaked as he flipped them. I watched his baldness in front of me and waited for him to end.

People sang afterwards. I had almost learned the words from the last funeral, so I nearly sang along. No-one was looking at me and the priest with the hat was turned away. I mumbled like the priest and sang loudly.

The thing was over soon. And I waited in that same narrow doorway I had come in by. This was after most everyone was gone. This was after they handed my mom the box with the guest-book, and gave my dad the keys for his car again, first in line. I watched the coffin now; I wanted to see what would happen to it and to him. And the man who came in to take the flowers away looked at

me and stopped. He looked at me and I looked at the wall and he messed with the flowers a bit longer than he had to. But I waited until he was done. I wanted to see.

He took something from under my grandfather's feet and put it into a hole on the box's side. It was a crank, and he turned it and turned it until my grandfather was deep inside the box and I couldn't even see the nose. Then white satin was pushed in around him and they closed the coffin lid. I left to get my coat.

DAVID CURTIS

Creative Process

He had never been much of a planter
Till his old friend erected the fence
And rambled a rose bush along it
To lend to his spite a pretense,

So he answered with roses in kind—
A thorn in the side of his foe
With beauty as sort of an adjunct
On ground where once nothing would grow.

Still it wasn't the enemy's flowers
Or love that he'd lost on the side
That called for a growning rejoinder
But bareness he couldn't abide,

Not commerce that argument shattered
But structure that made beauty sense,
For it wasn't the roses that mattered
But just the response to a fence.

DAVID CURTIS

Mater Diminuendo

She is creeping away from me now, back
Through my childhood towards infancy.
"Where is David," she asks out of nowhere,
"Over at Billy's?"—Billy my friend of youth,
Unseen for thirty years. How to respond
To this onsetting madness so incomplete
That she can peer through its dingy portals
And see the sane outdoors slip gradually by,
Witness the drawing down of curtained night
Just as murky silence closed in around her
Some years before. Now she awaits returns
That cannot be, like me from Billy's, hope,
Energy, purpose; and one new visitant
Whom she yet fears but still desires, for he
Alone pledges release. But oh he comes on slowly;
Despair and the horror of what she knows
She has become, what she must soon become
Have long since outstripped him. So she merely stares
Into what gray void I cannot, will not hazard,
Knowing only that that prospect and the glimpse
That skews its shape are now her life entire,
Her world the woods of Frost's sole oven bird
Without a sense of summer spent, or the song.

MICHAEL TONER

Phantom Soldiers

> "We see yonder the beginning of the day, but I think we shall never see the end of it."
>
> —Michael Williams, in William Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Act IV, Sc.i

He was known simply as "The Sarge."

When the Huey helicopter first deposited him at our jungle command post, someone remarked that President Johnson must be drafting guys from Veterans Administration retirement homes. There were more ridges on this platoon sergeant's face, and crisscrossed more frequently, than we had strung on the perimeter bales of concertina wire. He jumped clear of the chopper, grabbed his gear, and took in the surroundings as if he were scanning his back yard before Saturday clean-up. Nobody noticed the wreath-starred Combat Infantryman's patch over his fatigue pocket breast, indicating he had been in both World War II and Korea. For Vietnam was a young man's war. To hump ten kilometers into thick jungle and back, with a full pack, weapon and ammo, was the daily routine.

Would a geriatric garrison soldier be up to that kind of humpin'?

No way in hell, Jim!

On his first patrol "The Sarge" hoisted his rucksack to his shoulders, secured his weapon, placed himself unobtrusively near the middle in the order of march, locked his eyes to the front and gave the signal to move out smartly. Eight hours later the patrol returned. Intact. The "point man" leading the patrol—and the first person into the perimeter—was "The Sarge." His eyes steeled to the front, his face expressionless, his body fully erect. A few hundred meters later followed the rest of the straggling patrol members. It was as if "The Sarge" had been humping these boonies all his life.

He had.

The story of "The Sarge," as an example of the historical imagination, is of more than passing interest in this essay. He is the only person I know who, both figuratively as well as literally, has bridged the Vietnam War experience and that of previous American wars in our era.

The historical imagination is a sort of collective mythology governing the consideration of past events. It can placate or mobilize sentiment, depending upon the intent of the imaginers. A war can have as many interpreters as there are combatants, and the historical imagination in this context may know no bounds in its versions of what happened and why. Thus Herodotus is called the Father of History as well as the Father of Lies. Julius Caesar's Gallic War annals are not those of Vercingetorix. And what you read here may not appear

more than fancied myth. Yet somewhere beneath the detritus of human memory and human imagination lie shards of truth well worth the excavation. Attention, while it can be mustered, must be paid.

Why are Vietnam veterans so markedly different from previous American war veterans? Why is their experience so prolongedly traumatic? Why the "Wailing Wall" monuments? Why their silence, their alienation, anomie and anguish?

Why, indeed.

The struggle to answer in coherent fashion these difficult, soul-searching questions can be as disaffecting and traumatic as was the Vietnam War itself. Therein lies their importance—not only for Vietnam veterans and their attendant social milieu, but for all value-oriented historians, as well as future generations of America's youth whose potential for cannon-fodder is yet to be determined. And so an attempt must be made, in all good faith and no matter how futile, if the demons of war and of violence are ever to be exorcised, on both the inter-personal and the inter-generational levels in our country.

Literature teaches us that knowledge of the true nature of the self, of others, and of the cosmos is always won at great cost. Imagine the cost then, when one is delving into the nature of total evil that defines war. When the stakes get as high as one's mind, one's life, one's soul—the rewards, one would expect, should be proportionately significant, such as national liberty and self-determination and social equality.

Not so Vietnam.

As a Vietnamese interpreter once confided to me in the war zone: "This war has no meaning. It has gone on too long now. . .too many year, no end. . .your people, my people. . .what can it mean to any of us?" Shortly thereafter he paid for this knowledge with his own life. A war that had no meaning, seemingly no end, for its participants. A war that for Americans became the single most symbolic disruption, in both the individual consciences of Vietnam veterans and in the national psyche, since the American Civil War of 1861-65. Walt Whitman's nurse diary from that war is readily applicable to Vietnam: the interior histories of both these wars will never get in the books.

"Why are Vietnam veterans so markedly different from previous American war veterans?"

But let us return to the world of the Vietnam War "Whiners," and try to trace the origins of their G.I. jeremiads.

Like their World War II-initiated fathers, many, if not most Vietnam veterans went to war for two recognizable reasons: 1) symbolically, as an inherited rite of passage into manhood engendered by their fathers' and/or uncles' war experience; and 2) ideologically, to preserve America and/or Vietnam for democracy, with Communism instead of Fascism as the presumed enemy. The Vietnam generation, too, wanted to fight Studs Terkels' "Good Fight," experience "Love and Glory" in an Asian jungle similar to World War II's Pacific theatre of war. (The term, "theatre" is particularly ironic here, as the Shakespearean valor of Iwo Jima was quickly converted into the Artuad-like "Theatre of Blood" ignobility of Khe Sanh and My Lai.)

The differences in the logistical nature of the Vietnam War as opposed to World War II—the undefined battle lines, the inability to identify the enemy,

the chaotic nature of guerilla warfare—are best documented by seasoned historians. The differences in terms of effects of war upon Vietnam veterans in comparison with World War II survivors is less clear, though significantly more important, in the unfolding tragedy that is the Vietnam experience.

To many Vietnam veterans, the Pathé newsreel tickertape parades in New York, London and Paris for World War II's "V-E Day" (Victory in Europe) and "V-J Day" (Victory in Japan) seem, in retrospect, like Walt Disney cartoons. No such plaudits awaited their Odyssean return to a troubled Ithaca whose Penelopes had long since eloped with "Jody." Not only did Vietnam soldiers have no victory parades, but they had committed the unforgivable sin of American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Daughters of the American Revolution patriotism: they had lost a war.

Shunned, maligned and in some instances spat upon by peers, misunderstood by loved ones, enigmas unto themselves, Vietnam veterans returned to a country as turbulent and confusing as the Oriental one they had left. Anti-war protest, racial division and "Acid Power" were the order of the day. One had to repatriate as best one could; or drop out, an option exercised by more than a few veterans; or do oneself in—a growing cause for alarm. According to a 1983 government study, 9,200 Vietnam veterans had committed suicide, compared to 58,000 American soldiers killed in the war.

Most Vietnam veterans, however, have opted not only to remain on the planet but also to rejoin society, though often at some remove from the ever-madding crowd. Like Odysseus returning home from his travels, they have heeded Pallas Athene's caution: "Patience, iron patience, you must have. So give it out to neither man nor woman that you are back from wandering."

But no victory parades, war monuments nor eternal glory on the "Champs de Mars" would seem to heal the psychic and moral wounds inflicted upon Vietnam veterans by their war experience. A more substantial therapeutic regimen is needed, one that cleanses rather than cauterizes these wounds for an open-psyche suturing that requires vast team effort and vigilant monitoring. From the triage of Vietnam's victims, let us select the high-priority causes and begin our initial incision, if the requisite surgery is to be at all effective.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), though nominally an invention of the Vietnam War, existed in World War II, as it did in all wars. The anguish felt at the loss of a fellow soldier, and the pursuant survivor guilt, are unfortunately well-known to every combat veteran. Atrocities, too, occur in every war. What differentiates Vietnam veterans from their World War II counterparts in this respect is the complete lack of any normative social as well as personal reintegration process following the onset of the traumatic experience. In brief, World War II veterans were fully accepted, and their actions condoned as morally justified, thus allowing for relatively rapid repatriation and, for the most part, personal reintegration following their return to civilian life. No such atmosphere of acceptance and compassion existed for the Vietnam veteran. It is only in recent years where, during the intensive "rap sessions" of group psychotherapy, that Vietnam veterans have been able to express their impacted grief among themselves, and encounter their wartime experiences in an open and therapeutic manner.

But the heart of their problem, of their continuing troubled lives, is more cosmic than it is individual. The purpose and meaning—the moral validity—of

armed conflict, so accessible to and readily acknowledged by World War II veterans, is totally lacking in the case of the Vietnam veteran. The latter must look to World War I veterans for a kinship experience in repudiation of all learned values and beliefs, in a shattering of world-view that is of equal profundity. This is best exemplified in Erich Maria Remarque's classic war (and anti-war) novel, *All Quiet On the Western Front* (1928):

> Through the years our business has been killing;—it was our first calling in life. Our knowledge of life is limited to death. What will happen afterwards? And what shall come out of us?

To the character Paul Baumer's searing questions the Vietnam veteran adds: "How does one resume living when one's soul has died?" Remarque's answer: "Now if we go back we will be weary, broken, burnt out, rootless, without hope. We will not be able to find our way any more."

Could the loss of one's sense of self, and of one's soul—to use a theological term out of vogue in the common parley of American life-style—be what the "Wailing Wall" syndrome is all about? This deep mourning and attributed self-pity, recurring so many years after the initial traumatic experience of combat: is it all in their heads?

Apparently not, as recent medical evidence confirms:

> One of the most striking results (of tests for Agent Orange contamination) is that Vietnam veterans who were heavily exposed to Agent Orange exceed matched control subjects in 2,3,7,8-TCDD (TETRACHLORODIBENZO-P-DIOXIN) levels fifteen to twenty years after exposure.

For fluctuating economies, war is always a positive stimulant. The fact that the manufacturers of Agent Orange as well as many other domestic industries profited heavily from the Vietnam War while the lives of our nation's youth, especially the disadvantaged, were the human investment is a fiscal fact of life that is not lost on Vietnam veterans, providing some with a very jaundiced view of so-called "progress." No investment broker "bullish on America" ever had a son on patrol in the Southeast Asian jungle. As the Vietnamese would put it so succinctly: "Nevvah hoppen, G.I.!"

And so the Vietnam War has remained with these men and women who served in it, sometimes literally in body tissue, as carcinogenic in its physical potential as the realization of Vietnam's futility and immorality is malignant in its metaphysical potential.

But Agent Orange disease is not the only pathology afflicting the Vietnam veteran. To this must be added disproportionately high rates of unemployment, divorce, alcohol and drug addiction, psychiatric disorders and suicide. Why should this be so? Why should Vietnam veterans have such manifest

difficulty in getting their lives together? Should not the survivors of Normandy, Tarawa, El Alamein and Anzio be similarly afflicted? For that matter, what of the crew of the Enola Gay?

Again and yet again, one returns to the theme of the utter absurdity of the Vietnam War—an absurdity whose atomic half-life does not seem to diminish with the passage of flashback-filled time. Besides their innocence and youth, something else got left behind in the jungles of that country—something that defies anatomical classification, for the malady is of another order altogether. Professional employment counseling, psychiatric rehabilitation and charismatic religious rebirth are simple solutions to a much more complex question that Vietnam veterans, deep in their hearts, ask themselves daily: "Why did my brothers have to die?" It is the singlemost unaddressed and thereby haunting question of the entire war, and perhaps can only be answered by each Vietnam veteran unto himself. In this regard a few factors are worth examining, if only for the light of understanding and hope they might shed upon "the Wailers" and "the Wailing."

The average age of the World War II combatant was twenty-five. For Vietnam participants it was nineteen, thus labeling their conflict "The Teeny-Bopper War." Though no one can ever be fully prepared for the horror of battle, World War II soldiers were, for the most part, already-mature men when they were sent off to fight. But at age nineteen the personality is not yet fully formed, is in fact quite vulnerable to symbolic distortion. To stamp it with the aura of death, maiming, and the conviction that political, ethical and religious beliefs are blatant lies is the root cause of the psychic disruption that continues to plague so many Vietnam veterans.

Once more the historical imagination unearths strange artifacts from the impacted strata of time and memory. The persistent feeling that not only one's superior officers but also one's Commander-in-Chief (President) and one's country as a whole was needlessly sacrificing the lives of this youth corps of draftees and enlistees in the fields of fire of Vietnam can be a harsh realization, undermining all patriotic and ethical notions, perhaps permanently. Those who think this might be mere paranoid delusion have only to consider the repeated encounters this author has had with eighteen-year-olds in the badlands of Vietnam's Democratic Republic who had enlisted in Uncle Sam's "New Action Army" for a promised technical education, whose orders for same had been mysteriously "lost" in basic training, and who, within six months of joining up, found themselves in a combat zone with "Infantryman" as their sole military occupational specialty, and their technical education to be accomplished at the target end of a rifle or machine gun barrel. One's historical imagination can only bridle at the frequency of this occurrence, whose ultimate end is best summarized in the words of the late haiku poet, and great friend, Nicholas A. Virgilio:

telegram in hand,
the shadow of the marine
darkens our screen door

Into the contextual bargain must be considered the racial issue, for Vietnam saw the first fully-integrated military in the history of our country. And among

these a disproportionate amount of minority group soldiers underwent combat duty. The ghettos of America were conveniently emptied for military service, and later refilled with flag-covered coffins—an amazing tribute for a sub-population who, though they could not dine at lunch counters in towns where they had trained to go to war, were sent home swathed in the greatest symbol of our republic upon their demise. As one embittered Vietnam veteran has put it:

> There was a time when the red, white, and blue meant something to me and I loved this country, but I can tell you now that a country that burns yellow babies and starves black babies is a blood-sucking whore whose death I hope to live to see.

Such invective may seem an isolated instance of unsubdued rage; but for Vietnam veterans there is an uncomfortable, lingering element of truth in it, in terms of the racism that is at the heart of much of our domestic as well as international strife.

Racial divisiveness as well as potent drug addiction increased as the war in Vietnam staggered on, symptoms of a cleft in moral and religious values that plague the Vietnam veteran to this day. God went AWOL in Vietnam. As in World War I, shattered world-views brought fragmented faith; devotion to Christ's Mystical Body was replaced by "body counts" and "kill ratios." It was computer-style TV warfare, no holds barred and no break for commercials, with all of America as the targeted test audience.

"God went AWOL in Vietnam."

Unreal, you say. Tell me about it. For in Vietnam Thucydides' "Truth" became not only the first casualty: Truth got "zapped"; "wasted"; "blown away."

But what is most alarming to this observer is that the nature of the Vietnam experience has become the nature of the American experience. If this sounds far-fetched, try strolling through the inner-city of any urban area on any given night; or read the morning newspaper; or watch an evening television "action news" report. As the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh demonstrated so well when the war was raging, the origins for the killing lay here in America, not in the free-fire zones of his country. And like the remnants of youth with their thousand-yard, thousand-year-old stares who deplaned at Oakland and Seattle-Tacoma airports a few decades ago, the Vietnam War has returned to its homing-ground. When one considers the values currently governing our national frenzy for "self-realization"—irresponsibility, greed, intellectual bankruptcy—and their mirror image in the pervasive drug culture that guarantees a high for all age brackets, from "crack" to valium, it is amazing that the "Wailing-Walls" are not peopled round-the-clock with human waves of weeping Vietnam veterans. These silent, alienated, anomie-ridden pariahs may not have much left in the way of a soul, but they damn sure know what

it meant to possess one. And their "whining" has become an Edvard Munch-like scream, muffled by the frightening tenor of collective indifference.

The landscape as described herein is indeed grim. But the Dante-esque excavation of these lower levels of the Inferno may yet lead the courageous traveler upward to Paradiso, or at least a habitable Purgatorio. As always with humankind, the key to the problems lies within.

However unfathomable and aloof they may appear, these phantom soldiers, Vietnam veterans, are mere reflections of ourselves. They are the living—and in more than a few cases, dying—reminders of the greed, egotism, and false patriotism that led to the Vietnam War, and that yet undermines our national and international efforts toward peaceful coexistence. And their studied silence is an unmistakable indictment. The failure to understand their plight stems from a gap in our country's moral and ethical values. What is needed to bridge this, as well as the war-wearied generation gap, has its basis in nothing more nor less than genuine charity, "Caritas," love—be it Christian, Judaic, Islamic, Buddhist—whatever manifestation of regard and tolerance for others one can contribute. Easier said than done, admittedly; but the lessons of war, in every generation, teach us all too poignantly the cost of alternative strategies.

As James Baldwin once said: "One can only face in others what one can face in oneself." The ability to do this, in all honesty and integrity, is not only a core solution for the generation gap with Vietnam veterans, for our racial strife, for our national drug addiction.

It is now necessary for survival.

I suspect "The Sarge" would have understood the apprehensions of Shakespeare's Michael Williams quoted at the beginning of this essay, as well as the remorse of Remarque's Paul Baumer, mentioned herein. Like their peers of youth lost in battle, all old soldiers do some day die. It would be a great victory indeed, if not a genuine miracle, should the lessons of war be learned some day once and for all, should MAN-kind (emphasis mine) cease fighting wars, and should the lives and deaths of these men not have been in vain. The imaginings of literature and of history can sometimes coincide, and to good purpose:

> Forgive me, comrade. We always see it too late. Why do they never tell us that you are just poor devils like us, that your mothers are just as anxious as ours, and that we have the same fear of death, and the same dying, and the same agony—Forgive me, comrade; how could you be my enemy?

○○○○

CLAUDE KOCH

A Nurse Addresses Her Patron

(for MJK, R.N.)

Sir, beloved Practitioner,
Touch your daughter with your cure:

Bring me low to that demesne
Where the broken and the poor

In spirit, and the lame,
Are the medicine of hearts.

With your herbs and simples teach
That the healing spirit's art

Humbles its true ministers.
May I then in sickness see

How the wise Physician's pure
Medicine

Is pain.

A Story by

MARY CLEARMAN BLEW

The Snowies, the Judiths

A knock came at the door, and all eyes rose from the lesson. Mrs. Trask, looking troubled at yet another distraction, laid her book face down on the rules regarding *ser* and *estar* and went to answer it. Her first try at opening the door, however, met resistance. Had the knocker forgotten that the classroom doors opened outward into the corridor, or had he changed his mind about delivering his message, or was he merely being funny?

The students snickered, and Mrs. Trask flushed. It was hard enough for a substitute teacher to contain their excess energy during tournament season, let alone pretend to teach a lesson, without pranksters in the hall. She wrenched hard at the knob just as its resistance gave way.

The door opened so violently that the students saw Mrs. Trask lurch and almost lose her footing. Then she was taking a fast step back into the classroom. Her feet, however, in her new high heeled shoes were far from fast enough to balance the backward propulsion of her body. She landed on her back, her head bumping against the glazed oak floor. Her feet scrabbled frantically out of her shoes, as though in search of some small lost possession of great value, while her torso bucked and thrust in such a familiar and explicit way that some of the students laughed outright. But the most surprising thing about Mrs. Trask was the red flower that bloomed where her face had been, bloomed and pulsed and overflowed its petals on the oak.

Mary Dare in the back row had put her fingers in her ears to stop the vibrations. Now she took her hands away, because she knew what made her ears ring the way hers were ringing. She recognized the whine and crack, too, that had run like lightning around the edges of the explosion. Impossible to mistake those sounds. Only last weekend her father had let her fire a round with the .44, and her first shot had ricocheted off sandstone and whined. What she did not recognize, never had heard before in her life, were the staccato pips and shrills and squeals—well, yes, they did remind her of waking suddenly at night to the yammer of coyote pups, a pack of fools as her father called them, rallying for the first time in their lives with thin immature yips that chilled her and yet drew her out of her warm sleep to imagine herself walking with them through the cutbanks in the dark—the sounds that were rising now outside the classroom door and down the corridor as more shots reverberated.

Mary Dare stood up, thinking to see and perhaps comprehend. Then Ryan Novotny tackled her, big Ryan who as a senior really shouldn't have been in the first-year Spanish class at all but sat beside Mary Dare so he could copy her answers. Mary Dare found herself lying on her back between two rows of desks, looking up at the fluorescent lights burning away.

"Ho*ly*, Ryan," she said.

"Get down! Get down!" Ryan was yelling. "You crazy bastards, get your heads down!"

Now Ryan was crawling up the aisle next to hers on his elbows and knees. His rear end in his 501's was higher than his shoulders, and Mary Dare wanted to laugh at the sight he made. Somebody in the front of the room was laughing. Or hiccoughing, one or the other.

Mary Dare rolled over on her belly, wishing she hadn't worn her good white cotton sweater and jeans. She crawled below the surfaces of desks, as Ryan had done, over trails of dust and forgotten pencils and past crouching people's feet in shoes she recognized but never had expected to see at eye level. She crawled until she reached Jennifer Petty and took her hand and felt Jennifer's fingers lock on to hers while Jennifer went on hiccoughing and snuffling. Mary Dare lay with something, she thought a Spanish book, digging into her shoulder and her fingers in Jennifer's slippery grip. She could see the dark underside of Jennifer's desk, wafered with petrified discs of gum, and the pilling red dacron mountain that was Jennifer in her awful sweater from Bonanza, and the inside of Jennifer's fat white wrist so close to Mary Dare's face that Mary Dare barely could bring her eyes to focus on individual freckles. Not a hand Mary Dare normally would be holding. Jennifer was weird. Jennifer's fingers kept slipping almost out of hers, but at the last second Jennifer would grab on again, so tight that Mary Dare could see her own fingers turning as white as Jennifer's, with tiny red lines seeping out between them and crawling down her wrist into the sleeve of her sweater.

Mary Dare arched her back to ease it off the cutting edge of the book or whatever she was lying on and settled down to wait for Ryan. Nothing would happen until Ryan came back. Ryan would be her early warning system. Mary Dare reduced the disgusting underside of Jennifer's desk to a blur by focusing on the ceiling light and letting all thought escape her. Nothing ever had happened to her, nothing ever would again. Fighting this morning with Amy and her mother over the hair dryer or Amy's endless sappy Bon Jovi tapes, guarding her painfully acquired collection of cosmetics and her really nice sweaters, getting on the school bus this morning in the dark, looking forward to getting out of classes early for the basketball tournament—none of it existed. All was reduced to the pain in her back, and Jennifer's grip in hers, and the light endlessly burning.

A shadow grew over the mountain of Jennifer, thrusting its head between Mary Dare and the light. Mary Dare blinked, and the shadow took form as Ryan.

"I can't see nothing. It's crazy out there."

Mary Dare pulled back from the brink with regret. Lint stuck in Ryan's hair and rolls of dust tracked his sweater. She felt bored with the sight of him, then sick. She rolled up on her elbow, tentatively. The line of windows was too high for her on the floor to see anything of the world outside except the fading February daylight and the distant tips of the mountains, snow-capped. For a moment she almost could breathe the freezing clean air of escape, almost feel the snow on her ankles she ran.

"Forget it," Ryan whispered. "Them windows don't open. The bastards must of thought they was building a fucking jail when they built this place."

"Could you see him?" came a whisper behind Mary Dare.

"No, shit, couldn't see anything. I couldn't get far. All those doors and halls. He bagged Zeidel, though. I could see that."

Mary Dare closed her eyes. Ten feet away, on the other side of their wall, was the main corridor leading to the school offices. Lined with lockers, interspersed with classroom doors. After the utility dark greens and high ceilings of the old high school, the new doors painted in blues and violets had zinged at her for about the first week of school before they subsided into a familiarity as invisible as the soles of her feet.

The corridor had taken back its substance now, though. She could feel it through the wall.

"Always knew it would happen," Ryan was complaining. "Always knew it, always knew they'd pen us up like this and then take shots at us—"

"You're *paranoid*, Ryan," Mary Dare said. But she understood what he meant. She too, always had known somehow that it would come to this: the closed room, the graying windows, herself and all her classmates huddled under their desks, none daring to raise their heads while they waited for the inevitable next act. It was as though she had dreamed a thousand times about every detail. The hardwood floor, the dark underside of the desk, her knees drawn up, her arms wrapped around her skull; dreamed so many times, become so familiar that she no longer saw nor felt nor was aware of it, until now, by daylight, she recognized it at once. It was the end she had always known was coming, *and now that it's here*, unexpectedly rose her innermost voice, *we might as well get on with it.*

"Hey! Ryan! Town-ass!"

"What?" hissed Ryan.

It was Tom Barnes. She could see the blue flowered sleeve of his cowboy shirt; she remembered he usually sat in front.

"Could you see Zeidel?"

"Hell, yes. He was down. I could tell it was him by his suit."

Tom reared up on his elbows. "Oh shit, your arm."

"Yeh, her arm. And she calls me paranoid. Just because they're out to get us doesn't mean—"

Now that she was reminded of it, Mary Dare remembered how warm and wet her wrist and forearm felt. She glanced along the line of her sleeve and saw the sodden dark cuff of her white sweater and her red glistening fingers locked in Jennifer's.

"I don't think it's me," said Mary Dare. "It must be Jennifer."

To roll out from under Jennifer's desk, she was going to have to let go of Jennifer's hand. Testing, Mary Dare relaxed her fingers and felt a flutter of protest.

"Don't cry," Ryan pleaded.

"I *wasn't*," said Mary Dare. "Oh, you mean her."

Mary Dare dug the heels of her hightops into the floor and arched her back much as Mrs. Trask had done. By squirming on her shoulders and inching herself along with her heels, she got her head clear of Jennifer's desk and rolled over and sat up without quite pulling her fingers out of Jennifer's. She glanced around. Although the desks were more or less in their rows, even with books still open at the assignment, nothing seemed quite in its usual place or even in its usual shape or color.

"Get your head *down*!"

"Hell, he ain't after us," said Tom.

With her free hand Mary Dare probed the mess of red sweater and ploughed red flesh and found the pressure point in Jennifer's arm right where in health class they had said it would be. She bore down through the fat until she felt bone. The depth of her fingers brought Jennifer's eyes popping open.

"I'm sorry," Jennifer whimpered.

"What are you sorry about?" Mary Dare asked her, fascinated.

Jennifer's eyes met Mary Dare's. Mary Dare watched the tip of Jennifer's tongue run around her lips as though she was about to explain herself.

"What makes you so sure?" Ryan was arguing.

Tom Barnes squatted in the aisle in his blue flowered shirt with the pearl snap pockets and his cowboy boots with the genuine undershot heels that had to be specially ordered. "I seen him. He ain't after us."

"Who was he?" Mary wanted to know.

Ryan glared at Tom. Mary, caught between them, looked from one to the other. Ryan the town–ass, really massive, as the kids here still were saying, and the little Tom who wasn't embarrassed by wearing his team roping jacket to high school.

"Then how come she's laying here bleeding?" insisted Ryan.

"Hell, he was aiming at Trask, not us."

"You're being pretty fucking cool about it. For a goat roper. How come she's bleeding?"

He was glaring at Tom, as urgent as if his being called massive by everyone hung on Tom's answer. Mary Dare knew he had no idea that in Portland they wouldn't call him anything. Or Tom either, for that matter. They wouldn't know what to *do* with Tom in Portland. She never had heard of goat ropers until she moved back to Montana.

"Are you trying to tell me that ain't a fucking gunshot wound in her arm?"

"He just flung in a couple extra shots to keep us out of his way," said Tom. "He ain't after us. Petty probably just caught a ricochet."

Tom hunkered forward on his precious boot heels. Watching, Mary understood what he was doing, finally understood what her dad had meant when he caught her horse for the third time last weekend and then advised her to cowboy up. It was amazing. Tom Barnes had cowboyed up.

He studied Jennifer Petty's glistening face and the raw red crater in her arm where Mary Dare was pinching off the spurt of blood. "She ain't going to die of that," he said.

"Who *was* it?" Mary Dare persisted.

"I don't know his name, but he's a kid. I've seen him around."

"I know him," came a whisper from under another of the front desks. "I mean, I seen him around, too. I don't know his name, either."

"You're saying he's after them," said Ryan.

"Well, he got Trask," Tom Barnes said. "And you say he got Zeidel."

"I said Zeidel was down."

Ryan's face worked to contain the idea of being incidental. He was on the verge of tears, Mary Dare realized; she never had seen a boy's tears before, and she didn't want to look at Ryan's, so she shut her eyes.

"Wonder where he went?" came from the whisperer.

"Or if he lost his nerve," said Tom.

May Dare heard Ryan snuffle hard against his arm. At least the cowboy was keeping his nerve. The floor was grinding into her hip. She remembered the pine floors in the old high school. Softwood boards, varnished a dark brown that wore away by the spring of every year, hollow as the palms of hands from receiving the feet of generations of students. Floors trodden by her uncles in turn, all of them probably wearing boots like Tom's with undershot heels, and then her dad in his turn. This year should have been Mary Dare's turn. One of the reasons her dad wanted to move back from the west coast was so that Mary Dare and Amy could ride a school bus down the gulch into the shelter of the mountains, the way he had, and go to the old high school with kids like Tom Barnes. Her dad had recited the names of mountains, the Snowies, the Judiths, the North Moccasins, the South Moccasins, like charms against any counterarguments her mother could raise, like the fine strings program and the languages program for the girls at Santa Angela High School. Charms for safety, the Snowies, the Judiths, the North Moccasins, the South Moccasins. Snow–capped blue mounds that ringed the town and that had offered a haven even in the long ago days before there was a town and the Blackfeet had ridden down from the north to hunt and raid the Crows. The Snowies, the Judiths, the North Moccasins, the South Moccasins, charms against this moment which, she suddenly understood, her father too must have dreamed a thousand times.

But instead of haven there was the new high school with its low maze of corridors, built and paid for by a levy her parents and the parents of practically every ranch kid she knew had voted against. The old high school wasn't even there any more. On the square block on Water Street was only an empty crater. Little kids had howled in glee when the wrecking ball had knocked its bricks to rubble, its soft floors to splinters. The charm had not worked, the moment had come when she and probably Amy had had to crouch under the futile shelter of their desks in spite of anything her parents or anyone's parents could have done to avert it, the only difference between the dream and waking reality being that another kid, apparently, had pulled the trigger.

And now Mary Dare opened her eyes and met the frozen, astonished eyes of a man in a dark brown uniform with his revolver out.

In the glazed moment in front of the revolver, Mary Dare could remember only the necessity of keeping her fingers down hard on Jennifer's arm until the very end. Then she saw the man's lips move and found with surprise that she could hear what he was saying; in fact, his tone seemed unnecessarily loud, even distorted by volume.

"Oh shit no," he was saying.

"It's not me that's bleeding but still alive, it's Jennifer," she thought to answer, but she could not be sure he understood her or even heard her or, although his eyes were fixed on her, even saw her. The others were rising beside her, around her. She could sense their slow unfolding, arms releasing their holds, tentative white faces emerging from under the desks. Faces she could name, Tom Barnes and Ryan and Valier and Shannon and Stephen and Michael S. and Tyler and Michael J. and Ashley and Amber, like faces out of the dream, drained of life, all sockets and bones. And then, as they silently

rose together, staring across the gulf at the patrolman, he seemed to recognize them with a start. He reholstered his gun.

"We'll get you out of here," his voice boomed and ebbed. He looked from face to face, then wet his lips. "Don't worry, we'll get you out of here."

"I can't let go of Jennifer," whispered Mary. She felt glued to her.

"Somebody say he got another one?"

A sheriff's deputy in a tan garbardine jacket and a gray Stetson stuck his head in the door. His gaze wandered over Mary Dare and he started to say something else. Then his gaze fell to the floor and riveted there. Other men crowded the doorway behind him, vanished, reappeared. More highway patrolmen in dark brown, city policemen in navy blue. Mary Dare saw how their eyes, too, fell first to the floor and then rose in slow surmise to her face and the other faces in the room.

Ryan nudged her, more himself. "Looks like they got all the fuzz in Montana here."

"Something here you'll have to walk by," said the patrolman. "But you don't have to look."

"I can't let go," said Mary Dare. She could feel her own pulse in her fingertips, and faintly, Jennifer's. As long as she held onto Jennifer, She could put off the walk back into the ordinary.

But men were everywhere, all the fuzz in Montana, shoving through the rows of desks, kneeling beside her, their voices thundering at Jennifer while their fingers replaced Mary Dare's in Jennifer's wound. A draught streamed over her warm sticky fingers. She was being lifted by her elbows, steadied on her feet. "You done fine, little girl. We'll take care of her now."

One of the navy blue policeman had brought in a plastic pouch of yellowish fluid and was holding it above his head. A tube dangled down from it. Noise seemed amplified; Mary Dare wanted to yell at Amy to turn down the tape. She saw Jennifer being lifted on a stretcher with a needle taped into the fat part of her arm. The policeman with the pouch and the tube followed her. Mary Dare took a step after her, as toward her last link with flesh and blood, but hands held her her back and a voice flexed and roared like a distorted cassette tape over her head: "She'll be all right. Now we're gonna get you out of here."

The floor felt unstable under her, the way the ground felt after a long horseback ride. Mary Dare wobbled toward the door. She knew the others were following her in a shaky line, Valier and Shannon and Stephen and Michael S. and Tyler and Michael J. and Ashley and Amber and everybody. Police on both sides were guiding the line, not quite touching kids with their hands. The corridor ahead was hot with lights.

"A big step, now. We got a blanket down. But you don't have to look."

Mary Dare took the giant step and several baby steps and found herseelf in the throbbing corridor. She paused, getting her bearings by herself. She was standing in the main hall to the school offices amidst bright lights and confusion and unfamiliar smears on the floor. To her left was the north hall, to her locker, and she turned automatically in that direction. Then she stopped, fascinated. Band music was seeping through the barred doors of the gymnasium at the far end of the north hall.

Hands turned her, started her in the other direction, hovered around her as though she might dissipate through their fingers like smoke. "This way. We're taking you into the study hall for now."

"*Study* hall!" lamented someone behind her in line.

But news somehow was in the air, crackling in fragments.

"I guess for awhile they thought he was going to shoot up the *gym*."

"He's that kid that never comes to class. Somebody said they guessed he thought it was her fault he got the pink slip."

"They guess he musta thought Mrs. Trask was her."

"Wonder what happened to Zeidel."

The patrolman heard that and answered. "Mr. Zeidel took a hit in the leg and, uh, one in the lower abdomen, and they're taking him by air ambulance to Great Falls. We think he heard the shots and ran up the hall and, uh, met the kid running out."

"Wonder if he got away," said Tom Barnes low in Mary Dare's ear, but the patrolman heard, too.

"He ran out of the school and, uh, we don't have any other information as yet."

Silenced, they filed through the double doors. Mary Dare took the first desk she came to; it wasn't where she usually sat. The others were taking desks at random around her. a small cluster in the huge hall. Through the west windows she could see the last red stain of daylight.

"Wonder how the game came out," somebody whispered.

Sounds in the room were getting back to normal. A desk lid creaked.

"In here, sir,"said the patrolman at the door. Everyone looked up as a man in a dark suit and a tie came in and sat down on the corner of a desk opposite them. The man's eyes moved from face to face; he looked stricken at what he saw, but that too was beginning to seem normal.

"We won't be keeping you here long," he said. He nodded two or three times, promising. "Your parents, the ones we got hold of or who heard about it, are out there waiting for you. They want to see you, and we won't be keeping you long, but there's just a few questions, just one or two—"

He paused, and his mouth worked rapidly. Was *he* going to cry? Mary Dare looked away just in time. The red stain in the windows was darkening into nightfall. It must be way past the time when the school buses left.

"Did any of you see him?"

They shook their heads. Somebody, Valier, jerked a furtive finger across his eyes.

A stray voice from the hall cut in, angry—"in the middle of Montana, for chrissake, shit like this ain't supposed to go on here—" and was cut off as patrolman pulled the door closed.

"No."

"No."

"Mrs. Trask," said Tom Barnes. "We saw her keel over."

"Yes."

"Yes."

They all had seen that, they agreed, nodding. Ryan wore a slight smile. Tom Barnes was lazing back in his desk on his spine with one leg stuck out into the aisle and the other leg crossed over it. The teachers hated it when kids sat

like that. As though in the white glare of a searchlight, Mary Dare saw the downy hair on the back of Tom's neck and the bleached blue flowers of his shirt and the fragile overwashed blue of his levis. He looked like love's fading dream, Mary Dare thought. She knew she must look worse.

The man in the dark suit massaged his eyes with his hands. Maybe they all really did look like fading dreams to him. "We know you saw that," he said. "And I'm so sorry. Please believe me. I'd give anything if you hadn't had to. But did you see him?"

He was looking straight at Mary Dare.

"No," she said truthfully. "No."

He sighed and was silent. "All right," he said at last.

"We might have to talk to some of you again. Just maybe. But we'll hope not. We'll hope he—"

His voice died away. They waited. Finally he sighed again and slid off the desk without explaining to them what it was he hoped for. "Anyway," he said,"I know some parents who are going to be awfully glad to see some kids."

"I wonder who won the game," said somebody as they filed out of the study hall.

But that was one piece of news that hadn't floated down to them. Mary Dare thought the scrap of band music she had heard might have been the Libby Loggers' fight song, which might have meant Fergus was behind. She wondered if the kids had been scared to play basketball while policemem with shotguns guarded the exits of the gym, or if they had gotten used to it, or if they even had known about it.

In the adjacent classroom the faces of parents turned toward them like wet blobs in overcoats and heavy jackets and snowy overshoes. "Oh shit," said Ryan,"the old man wouldn't—oh shit, he is here."

Mary Dare saw her mom and dad just before her mom grabbed her. She felt the crush of wool collar and a wet cheek in her neck.

"Told you she'd be all right," said her dad. He had on his good Stetson. Melted snow dripped from the brim.

Mary Dare's mother let her go, except for one tight handhold, and turned on Mary Dare's dad. "Can't you see?" she cried, picking up their argument. "She's my baby, she's fourteen, she's only fourteen, and now I'll never get her back."

"Linda," said Mary's dad, and her mother stopped talking but went on crying quietly while her grip on Mary Dare's hand tightened.

"Hell, she's all right. These Montana kids grow up tough. You didn't see anything, did you, Mary Dare?"

"No," said Mary Dare. She barely could feel her fingers in her mother's grip.

They walked abreast through the double doors, her mother and father on each side of her as though she might disappear in their hands. Someone brushed against them from behind, trying to get past the three of them in the archway; it was Tom Barnes, in a hurry, pulling on his satin team roping jacket as he went.

"You need a ride home, Tom?" called her father.

He glanced back. "No thanks, Doc. I got my truck."

"He's a good kid," said her dad. "Was he there too?"

"Yes," said Mary Dare.

Across the dark half-filled parking lot waited a school bus hung with painted banners, dieseling. Kids in Libby Logger letter jackets burst out of the double doors behind Mary Dare and her mother and father and ran yipping across the parking lot toward the bus.

"Pack of fools," said her dad angrily.

"No," said Mary Dare. "No, they're not."

You're the pack of fools, she wanted to say, but she shivered instead. In the refraction of frost under the exit lights she still could see the outline of Tom Barnes, hunching into his inadequate jacket against the freezing bite of the air and walking rapidly through the tumuli of shoveled snow toward the north lot. The sharp sound of his boot heels on the scraped sidewalk receded as his shape faded beyond the radius of the lights, but for a moment Mary Dare followed him in her mind and faded with him into transparency in the dark. Far out in the circle of the mountains their glowing outlines fell to ash.

KAREN GREEN

Sonnet to My Father: After His Stroke

This statement of my uttermost regret,
this brash black marking a blank white sheet,
has been a long time coming, isn't yet
completed to my satisfaction, sweet
to my ear, may never reach the form and pitch,
the fine inflexion which all art demands.
Even so his flailing tongue does limp and lurch
no longer subject to his brain's commands
seeking to harness errant thought to word.
And as I grapple with elusive pattern
advancing on my prey, the truth is hard
to face, the prize might well be rotten.
So he, the further he progresses, knows
how great the gulf must be however far he goes.

J.B. GOODENOUGH

Pestilence

We do not speak,
We do not sit together
In our houses.
We do not dare gather
In the church.

We do not meet in groups
In the highroad
On market-days.
We do not shake hands
To seal our bargains.

There is something
Moving among us:
It blows like wind
Among us, and we try
To hide ourselves.

We have sealed our lips,
Tried to eat little,
To take small breaths,
Buttoning up against
Death's weather.

A Story by

WILLIAM J. SCHEICK

Watchman, What of the Night?

My father had an idea. He was trying to please my sister, who wanted to participate in a fund-raiser to be held by her high school. She was in her senior year, had been admitted to several good colleges, and wanted to celebrate. Turning to our father was typical of her whenever she ventured away from routine experiences. He was always willing to assist and champion both of us.

The idea my father had was ambitious, and I remember thinking at first that it would not succeed. He thought that the three of us could perform a song on stage. Although I played drums at occasional weekend parties or school dances with an insignificant band, and my sister had had extensive lessons on the keyboard before she quit at the end of her junior year, and our father had mastered the guitar, we had never thought of performing together. My sister loved the idea.

In a quiet tone of voice our father firmly warned her that we would have to practice until we were nearly sick of it and that he expected her to apply herself, especially since it was for her that we would be going through all this trouble. He told her that if, after all, it did not work, we were going to cancel, even if at the last minute. My father hated insufficient commitment in people, and he had seen my sister be fickle.

He once groused over something she failed to follow through on and tried to explain to me what he thought was the matter with her. "Adopted children sometimes have this problem," he said. "There's an absence in Andrea that represents her missing birth parents, and it's an abyss neither I nor anyone else, nor anything, will ever fill. It makes her easily distracted from commitment and makes her always unsatisfied with whatever she does or gets. I always thought that her third birthday party was a paradigm of what I would have to contend with. On that day she entered the living room, its table covered with a huge decorated cake and countless presents, some even on the floor, and balloons everywhere. Frowning, she paused and said, "Is that all?"

I could not help but wonder whether his observation applied to me too, because, like my sister, I am adopted. My sister was born in Cambodia, and I was born in Nicaragua. Both of us were abandoned orphans. Our adoptive father, as he once explained to me, did not want to give birth to children in a world about which he had "severe reservations" (his words), and knew there were countless children with no one to care for them. "But don't think that adoption is intrinsically a virtuous act, Jay," he told me. "It's fundamentally selfish and arrogant, even if mutually useful."

Three months old, I arrived in the house a year after my sister had, and six months later our mother vanished without a trace. She had taken several thousand dollars and her clothes. Not even her parents heard from her again,

or so they said. It was something my father did not talk about, and if pressed with questions from us, he gave very short, exact answers. He seemed to accept her disappearance as if it were some inevitable fact of nature. He raised us alone, making dinners, doing the dishes, and washing the clothes, and none of it seemed to give him very much trouble.

"I have an excellent job for raising a family," he told me once. "Since my schedule is adjustable, there is always plenty of time for me to spend with the both of you. When you were young the scholarship, especially the writing, could often be done while you slept at night."

He was a professor of English literature who specialized in the fiction of the turn of the nineteenth century. He produced plenty of articles and books, and was eventually chaired. He must have liked to interpret. Although he interpreted fiction from many different perspectives, he seemed to be very interested in Schopenhauer's influence on such novelists as George Gissing, Thomas Hardy, H.G. Wells, and Joseph Conrad. He admired *The Good Soldier* as a masterpiece. He dedicated his books to my sister and me. Later I tried to read them and a few of the articles, but without much success. Reading is hard for me, and my father's writing is particularly difficult to understand.

Whenever I wondered whether his remarks about my sister's failure to sustain commitment and about her dissatisfaction with everything also applied to me, I thought of the problems I have with reading. At sixteen I should have been in my junior year at the same high school as my sister when she wanted to do something for the fund raiser. But I had dropped out of school, which had been an utter misery for me for as long as I can remember. My father made countless attempts to help me, especially with my schoolwork. When I had been promoted to third grade without being able to read, he spent two hours of every day during that entire, exhausting summer to teach me to read, at least enough to get by. In spite of all his efforts I eventually dropped out of school, took a job selling fast food, and earned a little extra money with the band on some weekends. He occasionaly reminded me that if I wanted to get some sort of vocational training, there was interest-accruing money he had, when I was first adopted, put aside for college. He never made me feel bad about my decision to drop out of school. He said he understood. Yet I often wondered what he really thought, particularly when he made comments to me about my college-bound sister.

For the high-school performance my father borrowed a lot of equipment, including another keyboard, some microphones, and several amplifiers. It is surprising how much musical equipment can be borrowed. There are so many people who once thought they were going to succeed at music and who purchased expensive instruments and gear, but who eventually gave up their dream.

Andrea was startled that our father intended her to play two keyboards at the same time, one sometimes to provide bass or other effects. After a particularly rigorous rehearsal session, of which she was getting very weary, she said to me, "I think if he could figure out how I could grow a third hand or maybe use one of my feet, he'd have me playing a third keyboard."

Our father had written two songs for us. The parts in them for his electric guitar were so powerful that sometimes his playing made strange feelings well up in me and made the back of my neck tingle. My sister's music swelled to

fill in the spaces between my father's playing and also to give body to a background of sound.

Unlike my sister, I could not read the music my father composed on his home computer. Since the time an instructor taught me how to hold the sticks, to tune my Pearl drums, and to use different heads, I have always played by a mysterious innate capacity. I can mimic what I hear or sense out what might work in a composition. My father, who could compose for the keyboard as well as the guitar, did not know much technically about playing drums, and so he tended to give me little verbal directions. He helped me experiment with the placement of mikes. He urged me to loosen up, be unrestrained, and work in odd-time rolls.

But once I overdid showing off my chops. I remember, as if looking at a picture of him, how he suddenly stopped playing his guitar and stared at the floor of our family room, where we rehearsed. After all that amplified volume—my father's music was energetic and loud—the silence of a few seconds seemed enormous and oppressive. In a quiet voice my father said, "Jay, maybe you should move you and your stuff outside."

It was the only time in those three months of relentless practice that he criticized my work. Actually he said more than once that he really admired my instinct for percussion. Sometimes I felt that he and I were playing to each other, almost as if Andrea were absent from the practice session. His guitar playing, full of subtle variations (so unlike most 2 and 4 rock music), really did affect my own performance, driving me to work changes into my own patterns.

One day I told him how wonderful I thought he played the guitar. "Like you with the drums, I guess I have a feel for the guitar. I don't believe I can take much credit for it, though. And don't be taken in by the power given to any instrument by the amplifiers. An electric guitar is really a cheat because it can give a deceptive impression of just how hard its player is working. The fact is at my age my fingers aren't as limber as they once were. Just another deceptive appearance in a business that is truly all show," he said. "But I like the electric guitar because it communicates powerfully. It matches what I feel. When I play I am in touch with myself unlike any other way. Then I'm not thinking, but fully listening to the sound, the sound of all of us together."

My father knew a lot about rock music. Rock and roll first emerged in the 1950s, when he was a teenager. He never lost his interest in it as he grew older. He said that he had created countless songs in his head over the years, and had wondered whether anyone else would have liked any of his music. My father still bought rock records, even more than Andrea and I did. He liked more recent rock better than the older examples.

"You know," he told me one day, "did you ever notice that when we are in a record store I am the oldest person browsing in the rock section, the oldest person by twenty years? And when I purchase rock music, the clerk looks at me strangely, as if I should blurt out confirmation that these records are for my children, not for old, bald me." Nothing deterred him, however, from regularly buying the records.

After we had the music down well enough, we had to face the problem of the lyrics of "Shadows" and "Flux." My father first thought Andrea might do the singing, and she liked the idea. But there were problems. Understanding the

lyrics was potentially a problem. Heaven only knows what precisely they were about, though their sharp images apparently expressed a steady defiance against something. Actually, whatever they meant, the songs suited the music well. The real problem was my sister's preference for another kind of music and her voice, which our father came to think of as too thin to match his intent. The Wilson sisters of *Heart* might have done justice to my father's lyrics. Andrea couldn't. And I couldn't.

He settled on the two of us singing together. Although this worked quite well, it was devilishly more difficult to accomplish than someone who has not tried it might guess. My sister was not particularly pleased with this decision, but our father convinced her that we needed more voice volume to be heard over the instruments. As the date of the actual performance approached, Andrea seemed to catch fire in our practice sessions, which had previously been somewhat annoying to her.

Just as our father had rigorously controlled our rehearsals, he was relentless in his plans for our appearance on stage. He got several concessions from the fund-raiser organizers, including the positioning of our performance immediately after a comedy act which permitted the stage curtain to remain closed. He insisted on this because he wanted to recheck all the equipment carefully just before our appearance, especially to insure the proper settings and positions of the amplifiers. His commitment was complete.

Although we had practiced two songs, we were to play just one, the one he thought we did better. As we waited behind the curtain, I suddenly started to sweat. I could not understand why, since I had previously played in public. But I had never played in public with and for my father before, and I guess this must have been the reason. Then the curtain went up, and we were performing. Afire, I was caught up in the current of my father's composition, in the force of our combined music, and in the harmony of my voice with my sister's. Then the singing was over, and our performance was ending, as is characteristic of my father's compositions, with a hard-driving instrumentation which, whenever I was at this point, I always wished would never end.

As the last sound of our instruments died away, there was a void, like the heavy silence in our family room when, that one time, my father criticized my work. They were very long seconds of empty silence, while I thought I had been right in originally thinking we would be a disaster. Then thunderous applause and shouts from the audience, who had been overwhelmed by our performance and surprised by the technique my father used in the ending of his composition. It was like a wave crashing over us. Then shouts of "More!" Andrea was looking at her father for some sign of what to do, and I was watching him and her. She was not smiling. She seemed stunned by the unexpected demand, but my father made eye-contact with her and nodded, and then with me. I started to play, and we were launched into the second song, the only other one we had prepared.

When that song ended the audience again erupted, demanding more. Of course we had no more to give, and Andrea looked confused. My father looked surprised too, but he took control by bowing, and we followed his example.

Mercifully the stage curtain closed, and the next act started against the slowly declining noise of the audience.

Later mingling with her friends, Andrea was the center of a beehive of attention, more than ever before in her life, as my father and I moved all the equipment into the rented van. He seemed lost in thought. Recalling this image of him always makes me wonder if he had the slightest inkling that our life would never again be the same.

Several weeks passed before my sister, now a high-school graduate, asked our father to undertake another performance. As I walked into the living room Andrea was talking to him while he was trying to listen to the evening national news. She wanted us to enter a contest, a Battle of the Bands to be held in August.

"Why do you want to do this? What's the point?"

"To see if we can win. Like we did at the fund-raiser."

"That's not why I did that. I did that for you and for the school."

"So do this for me too. I really want to see if we can win. It'd be fun."

"I doubt that you found all the practice so much fun. It would be much, much worse this time. And the audience for this sort of thing is very different from what we had at your school. You can't expect to be so lucky this time in pleasing the audience."

"We're good, dad. We can do it. I really want to do it before I start college. And Jay wants to too," she said turning and looking into my eyes.

I had known nothing at all about her plan. But I didn't care. I actually enjoyed playing together with them. My father probed and resisted, tried to dissuade her, but finally yielded to her whim several days later. He always had difficulty denying Andrea what she wanted, even when it cost him a lot of trouble.

He borrowed and rented even more equipment than the first time. There was some recording equipment too because, he thought, we needed to hear how we sounded. Our family room became a maze of wires, a permanent messy studio where we practiced relentlessly. I felt especially good when we jammed together.

My father spent a lot of time helping Andrea get special effects from her keyboards, and to control her singing of the seven new songs he eventually wrote for the contest. I had tuned my drums to get a new specific pitch and resonance. My father always urged me to improvise with different frills, especially during the instrumental parts. And he helped me with singing too because drumming and singing at the same time is exhausting, even if Phil Collins of *Genesis* makes it look easy. My father, who decided to dispense with any extraordinary stage effects and to have us make our impression solely with our music, spent long hours alone trying out different patterns of sound on the keyboards and on his guitar. We were all completely enveloped in Andrea's dream.

If the rehearsals were gruelling, the actual contest play-offs were worse. My father's forceful compositions, with so many variations, and my tendency to match his own playing threatened to tire me prematurely. I would be tempted to start out on an adrenaline high, so I had sometimes to pace myself consciously. But mostly we would catch fire, and I would forget myself as I became totally absorbed in the music.

We won second place, and the force of the enthusiastic response of the audience was unforgettable. The peculiar band we were, we also won some attention from the press, which published a photograph of the three of us on the stage. My sister is smiling, and no doubt had already made her momentous decision.

When Andrea told my father the next day that she was not going to college but wanted to perform professionaly, I heard the air leave his lungs. After a long silence, he sounded about as angry as I ever heard him.

"Now that is a bad decision, a really bad decision. Do you have any notion how many bands there are and how many of them fail to get anywhere? Do you know that even most of the bands that break through last only a short time because their audience is fickle? Life if hard enough, but there's particularly no future for you in *that* life."

"I can do it, dad. Look, we won big at the school and the competition, didn't we?"

"Andrea, all of that is utterly small time, insignificant, meaningless. And lucky. You're deluded. The whole rock business is a damned illusion worse than most. Stop deluding yourself with images of false glitter and attainment. Ideas like this can make you crazy."

"You just don't understand. This is all that matters to me now. I don't want to do anything else. It is all I can think about, and I know I can do it. And I met this guy who says he knows someone who can help me get started. He works with people who do real well in Battle-of-the-Bands contests."

"He makes it sound too easy, and you know it. That world gives more grief, more frustration and misery than most. Forget this idea."

"Why won't you support me?" my sister said angrily. "You only agree to what you want me to do. What about what I want to do?"

My father propped his forehead in the palm of his hand and looked down at the floor. "You know that *image* is everything in that world. Even if I had the time or wanted to, I could not perform in the band with you. I'm too old-looking. The band would never have a chance."

"I know that, dad. I never intended for you to be in it."

She meant for me to be in it, though. She meant for me to break off my relationship with my current group and to venture off into her fantasy. She made clear that she was counting on me. But after I had agreed, I heard elsewhere that the man who gets Battle-of-the-Bands contestants started told her that the group's name *Flash* and most of its members had to be preserved in order for him to market us successfully as a winner in that competition.

We needed a new guitarist, and my father (squelching his unhappiness with my sister's decision and, as he told me later, secretly hoping she would soon change her mind) interviewed several dozen people before he recommended one to us. He investigated our prospective manager too.

Since people were curious about the band from the publicity campaign by our manager, we started off two months later with some decent gigs in local clubs. There wasn't going to be much money, the manager reminded us, at least not at first. The point was to make a big local impression, make a successful local record, and then break away from the local scene. He always told us how great would be our future. He was good at what he did.

We practiced at our home. My father purchased some stage equipment for us and coached us. Nevertheless, our performances did not dazzle the club audiences, which upset Andrea. She began to make some changes. She wanted to sing solo, and for me to do backup vocals only. I didn't care because singing sometimes interfered with my drumming. Then she wanted less instrumental output from me and the guitarist, and she began to write some of her own songs. Our father kept adjusting to all of these changes, keeping to himself whatever reservations he had. He always tried sincerely to help, but probably he thought all of Andrea's alterations would only hasten the demise of the band. Then, he must have hoped, she would get back to a saner direction in life.

After six months of uninterested and even declining audiences, and of bad reviews, the band failed. The manager told us that he could no longer get us gigs and that he had to devote his energies elsewhere. Andrea was angry, and at one point accused me of harming the band by overplaying my part. Why else, she shouted, had several reviewers focused their only praise on my drumming. For a while she tried on her own to get club engagements for us, but nothing worked out.

Our father was sympathetic. He wanted to make her feel better, but she had collapsed within herself and avoided us as much as possible. He explained to me how important the whole venture was to her, and he added (though I did not understand him), "For her it's the fall of Babylon, and all the graven images broken into the dust." He told me to give her some space to cope with her disappointment, that she would come around again. That's not what happened.

On March 21, at the age of eighteen, my sister died in her bedroom from an overdose of drugs. Not street drugs, we were told later, but prescribed medication taken from our father's medicine cabinet. My father entered her room and found her when his persistent knocking on her door did not awaken her. Lying on her bed, her head on a pillow, she looked as white as a frozen ghost.

I saw tears fall from my father's eyes, as he stood framed, as if in a photograph, by the window in my sister's room. I had never seen him weep before. He admired grit in the face of adversity. I know he had approvingly remarked to me once that I had never cried since I had turned two, not even when my head slammed into the dashboard of his car the time he had to avoid an accident nor the time I fell out of a tree and broke my arm.

"There was no right answer," he said hunched in the same chair he occupied when my sister told him of her decision to forget college. "I did this. Something in me engendered this." After a pause he added, "Compassion is futile against reality. It's just another delusion."

This troubling remark seemed a little clearer later when I read the only short story my father wrote. Under a pseudonym (identified on a master list he kept of his publications) he had years ago published "Watchman" in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. It tells about an alien race which studies a copy of *The World as Will and Idea* and decides that euthanasia is the most compassionate act they can perform for wretched humanity. Although the

hero of the story succeeds in getting the aliens to read other writings demonstrating quite different attitudes towards existence, he fails to convince them that these other documents are not merely distorted expressions of the perverse human will to live regardless of the essential misery of human life. The aliens point to the awful facts of mankind's history and conclude that humanity is unwittingly deluded, like a child not knowing what is best for him. Out of pity they benignly destroy the entire human race. At the end of the story, however, the aliens find themselves infected by Schopenhauer's ideas as they anxiously ponder, for the first time, the aptness of his vision to their own experience of life.

That is a funny conclusion, I guess, both humorous and serious. I am not sure just what my father meant by it. Did he mean that in a paradoxical way humanity, always so lacking in pity, would ironically have revenge? Or that mankind is so inherently destructive that any race which comes in contact with it will be destroyed in one way or another? Or something as simple as, ideas can be as dangerous as a deadly disease? Reading comprehension was always my worst problem in school. But the day after he found Andrea he dismissed compassion as a delusion, and that surely has something to do with the meaning of his short story, which insofar as I know he never mentioned to anyone.

Aside from casual conversation, he said very little, nothing of substance, to me in the days following Andrea's burial. Making coffee one morning I heard him remark, to himself I think, "I keep seeing her at the periphery of my vision." He taught his classes as usual, cooked meals, opened the mail, cleaned house, watched the evening news. He would not go into her room or into the family room, still full of our equipment, and he would not listen to music or talk on the telephone. I tried to take care of whatever I could so that he would be less bothered. His face got thinner.

On April 21 he died when on his way to the University his car crashed into the edge of a highway bridge. The situation was suspicious, the investigating police reported, but there was no way to prove just what had happened. Since my father was depressed and distracted, he could have just lost control (of the car, they meant). So there would be, others said, no trouble with the insurance. My father had recently made the semiannual payment.

That was two years ago. I live in my father's house. Besides the insurance, he left me plenty of money.

I play for another band. When I drum I forget everything else. In the half-shaded background of the stage I fully commit myself to our performance. I guess this band has a chance to make a name for itself. I know the others really want that. Our manager tells us that the local success of a song on our demo tape, given so much FM air time, is eventually going to attract the attention of a large company which will distribute our work nationally. "Sit and Wait," a song that I mostly wrote for the band (since I can now work some with musical notation) and that I've been told somewhat echoes my father's compositions, was chosen for inclusion on the demo tape. We have been given a lot of attention by the city newspapers, where our group picture has appeared several times.

Now and then I look at my father's favorite pictures. He particularly admired a book of photographs by Michael Ruetz, who (he wrote on an endpaper of the

book) "finds in the rugged, broody Scottish landscape an incomparable reflection of cosmic vacancy and human loss." Of his own pictures he preferred one of Andrea at the age of seven sitting on a tiny island of rock surrounded by water. Behind her head there is a trace of green weed somehow surviving on that barren rock where my sister sits squinting and frowning. On the back of this picture my father wrote: "Lifeforce in a Hard Place."

Sometimes in the dusky family room of my father's house I sit and keep watch in the evening's shadows. I study the yellowing newspaper photograph of Andrea, my father, and me. There the three of us are together like faded graven images. As if victorious over impossible odds, she smiles in the ashen light. Behind us, my father seems intently to watch her smile. Sometimes when I dwell on this picture, the image of them shimmers like a twilight mirage and begins to blur.

OOOO

EMILIE BABCOX

Dead Classmates

The first few were accidents, of course.
Almost reassuring, as though they proved,
perversely, that our own luck would now hold.
The ones who joined them later
puzzled and angered us.
But now, watching the bus fill up,
we begin to be anxious.
It looks as though
the old peer pressure may prove
too strong once again.

BERTOLT CLEVER

Gloom

Grandpa's worse again: the doctor comes
every other day, Mom says.
He gave me a chainwatch once.
The glass window over the face opens;
the back opens too: tiny gears and levers
like insect legs meddling meticulously.

Mom says she talked to Ed; she told him she was glad,
after all these years, they could still be friendly;
then he invited himself down from Milwaukee, and she shut up.
"He asked about you; he still plays golf in Florida
in the winter." It lifted up her gloom, she said,
to talk to Ed, but she had, she said, to be careful.

The gloom mixed up with Pale Sister's third
pregnancy: "It's happened again: she doesn't move her mouth
when she talks; she can't keep anything down."
But Mom's going to Savannah, Georgia next week
so she can "live immediately, without
an agenda." Her gloom is thick
and stale; but she can nudge it occasionally.

I know what Sister looks like when her mouth doesn't move,
morose; I know how *Opa* sits in pain, eyes closed, chin lifted,
mouth slightly open on the brown sofa by the radio,
an ancient tear slowly navigating his complex face;
I know how Mom will always be alone, will always
wear her gloom stiffly with a hint of pride.

And I hear the second-hand.
Chop. Chop. Chop.

BERTOLT CLEVER

"...And a thousand miles behind."

These are all Wednesdays now;
somehow, brother, we got cornered at the crease
in the middle of the week: the past fold up, the future
steep: down we slid.
Every day became just another day:
put to the wind like the check for rent.
Last Monday, perhaps, we could have been
up till four badgering one another's philosophies
with such fond indignation; now it's not even clear
what there is over which to disagree.
Unable to raise a righteous finger,
or find the fever for debating Love,
or ride together the singing blade of a guitarnote
or chew the meat of a book from both ends—
it's become cold and quiet in our rooms
and we fade humbly from the world.
We could fill the air on Tuesday, perhaps,
with shards of ornate topics,
hitched together like dominoes,
then tilt the table and go to bed early.

Don't tell me another week has passed;
remind me when it's time to go.

It's bad enough, you flat on your back
like a beetle, and me walking around places
I don't belong with my helmet too tight
and a wristwatch choking my veins—but we can't even
capture this grotesque monotone
with a richly demented, decadent phrase:
we can't say anything out loud without falling
over the dreaded knowledge: "I have said this before."
Supine at the center of our lives, brother,
we know it's no time for a nap—but when we pick up a book
or prop the guitar at our hips, our lids close down
like old bottlecaps, and that tepid ache begins again. . .

Don't tell me another year has passed;
remind me when it's time to go.

Book Marks

John Silber
Straight Shooting: What's Wrong with America and How to Fix It

New York: Harper & Row, 1989
336 pp. $22.50

Reviewed by
Patrick Ellis, FSC

This is a book one wants to like, because John Silber is so often on the side of the angels. All things considered, it would be wonderful if his series of essays held any real hope of fulfilling the promise of the bumptious subtitle.

Silber, President of Boston University, has given us a series of secular sermons, For his courage to be so relentlessly unfashionable, I have nothing but praise. A more guarded reaction must be entered, however, for his occasionally wrongheaded and sweeping generalizations and judgments of motive, especially in the political arena.

What appears to have happened is that Dr. Silber has gone through his files and amassed various writings of interest, forcing them to cluster under three umbrellas: general principles, academic matters, and cosmic concerns. It is all vintage Silber, so that much of it is known already (tuition prepayment and vouchers are cases in point).

As this review is written (January, 1990), time has already been unkind to Dr. Silber. His often-reiterated mistrust of all things Soviet has passed out of fashion (though he *could* be right if the Soviet economy and nationalistic upheavals topple the leader of the moment). His lumping of all seekers of lasting peace and disarmament into a stew of Chamberlains and flower children is doubly unfortunate in the light of very recent history.

At least by implication, then, the author holds on to all of a huge defense budget, thus perpetuating the denial of funding to most of the needs in Silber's agenda. The book's construction doesn't require him to face that dilemma, since the various essays are so self-contained. A cross-check of such contradictions would have been beneficial.

Proportion and emphasis are problems for Dr. Silber as author. His convincing dissection of certain grant-funded bilingual education is delivered with the same intensity as his strictures about family disintegration and drug abuse. One can agree with him all along, while regretting, for example, the inclusion of a two page screed of Kipling and dozens of copybook moralisms. These were certainly lively hours before an audience—and he's compelling there—but on the page they don't have Silber's sparks-flying personality behind them.

It is not easy to see how President Silber has managed—as a professional philosopher—to be so expert in so detailed a manner in so many areas. Few in any

Book Marks

walk of life would stride so confidently into Central America, for example, as he does, again suffering in his final product by the inconsiderately rapid pace of events.

> The key to resolving the crisis lies in a two-sided U.S. approach: to reinvoke the principles of the Kennedy Doctrine and hold the Soviet Union and Cuba to the terms of the 1962 understanding, and to give full encouragement to the revolution for democracy that is sweeping Central America. (p.261)

In addition to the assumption that the Soviets are still behind it all, this formulation assumes that the various situations are comparable. But how do we know whether insurgents are good guys or bad guys? Recent tragic events in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala demonstrate that it isn't easy to know who's guilty of what. What is certain is that there is, on one way of phrasing it, no such thing as a Central America where one mode of operation fits all cases. What we might do for starters, of course, is bring into our government service persons who know the several cultures. Some interesting specifics are a tightly logical defense of unborn children—among the best I have seen—and a ringing defense of local financing of public schools—failing to take into account the mobility of their products, whereby the majority of adults do not live near where they were schooled.

While the subtitle, "What's Wrong with America and How to Fix It," is never fulfilled in any explicit way, there are plans advanced, such as prenatal nutrition, but the author must know that one-person one-vote democracy won't vote for austerity, the only route to the massive income transfers that must occur if poor children are to be rescued from the permanent underclass.

No nation in history has tackled the agenda set out by Dr. Silber unless driven by a broadly-held faith or united by a terrible crisis, or both. The clarity with which he sets forth our problems can lead only to profound discouragement in the absence of means to "fix" what's wrong.

Apparently conscious himself of the bleakness of his conclusions, D. Silber ends the book with several pages of optimism—announced as such—in which he proclaims that things will get better because they must, and that it is the young people on campuses who will lead the way.

> My optimism for the future of our country rests on the growing dissatisfaction among our people with hedonism and materialism as a way of life. I see this in the growing awareness of the unease about our problems: the homeless, the underclass, crime, drugs, the budget deficit, our apparent inability to compete in world markets, our uncertain and inconsistent foreign policy.

In his better moments on the platform, John Silber would dismantle that reasoning no matter who said it.

ANNE HIGGINS

Open Hearted

A nest of tubes,
a cradle of monitors,
someone in there
whose breastbone
has been pulled open
like French doors
and whose heart,
almost broken,
has been handled,
and laid bare,
in front of strangers.

Heart laid bare,
the weakest walls
exposed
and shored up,
clogged arteries
discovered and cleared.
Heart handled,
and put back
for its red roots
to settle.

The days after,
each beat wonders
will I live?
Every breath hurts.
The months after,
each beat waits for the seals to set,
for the scar,
like a mummy's mouth,
silent ceiling over the
hidden stitches,
to pale a little,
to flatten and soften its grimace
a little.
The years after,
street clothes hide it.
hide the question
will I walk?
will this heart sustain me
in the sprints of joy,
the sweats of panic?

The psalm says
Open hearted,
the good person
gives to the poor.
We stand,
survivors of less visible repairs,
looking in at the nest of tubes,
following the arpeggio of beats
on the monitor.

K.K. BUSH

A Fruit Fell Down

A fruit fell down for me, for me,—
Fell full, round, ripe, color beyond
Gold, taste beyond delight.

When Conscience, Science, and the Church pinched
Peeled, stewed and strained the
Thing, looking for seeds—I lost my appetite.

ALYSIA K. HARPOOTIAN

Balancing

So I'm leaning over watching the record spinning
I can see myself in it
So in a sense I'm spinning too, aren't I?
I think of all the things that can spin, do spin,
That have spun.
Wheels. Skaters. Tops. Coins.
All the things you would expect to list.
But really what I think of
Is my stomach every time, I mean every time
I see you
Seeing me.

Contributors

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J. B. GOODENOUGH is a free-lance writer from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her first collection of poems, *Dower Land*, was published in 1984. Her new volume, *Homeplace*, is due out this year.

Contributors

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JOHN LUKACS is the author of over a dozen monographs dealing with historical topics including the highly regarded *Historical Consciousness*. He is currently completing a study of the Churchill-Hitler rivalry in the dangerous summer of 1940.

JANE SATHER grew up in Los Angeles, received her B.A. degree from California State Universityand her M.F.A. from the Unversity of Oregon. While there she worked with Ken Kesey on the collaborative novel CAVERNS which was published in January 1990 by Viking/Penquin. She currently lives in Springfield, Oregon.

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SONYA SENKOWSKY, a member of the class of 1990 at La Salle, appears in these pages for her first publication outside of journalism markets. Previously, her articles have been published in *The Grapevine Weekly*, *The Syracuse New Times*, *Finger Lakes Magazine* and the *Girard Home News.*

MICHAEL TONER, a 1971 graduate of La Salle, is an actor and playwright whose plays include his Vietnam war drama, "Mortal Men." As an actor he has performed in the American Shaw Festival, the Edinburgh Theatre Festival and the James Joyce Centennial in New York. He writes: "This essay is dedicated to Claude Koch, Inspiring Mentor, Fellow Grunt, and Trusted Friend."

BILL WINE is Associate Professor in the Communication Department of La Salle, as well as a playwright and movie critic. He, of course, would never take his newborn daughter, Paulina, to a movie theater.

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